

EARLY DICKINSONIANA

The Boyd Lee Spahr Lectures

In Americana

1957 - 1961

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A SENSE OF HISTORY

INSTITUTIONS of learning hold a singularly happy place in the history of human endeavor, in that few people ever regard them with enmity, and many with gratitude and loyal devotion. Their search is for truth rather than for advantage, and such conflicts as they have are internal and an element of growth. Each has its supporting multitude of friends. Each has its own great figures, and has grown in the measure of their wisdom and dedication. There is a pattern of affirmative influences from many sources, and of strong guidance from a few.

Our college has lived out its span of nearly two centuries in this familiar pattern, and for the last third of that long period of years has felt the friendly hand and followed the leadership of one man—a man whose self-dedication is truly unusual both in time and in the warm immediacy of the connection. This has been the guidance of a man with a sense of history, with a desire both to illumine the past and to build upon it. His has been from the first a policy hostile to parochialism and open to advance. His success can be reckoned in the difference between the college of sixty years ago, and the college of today.

It has been an historian's policy, deliberately bringing to the College a fresh awareness of the lives and gifts of those who have given it character and strength. The small portrait collection, accumulating since mid-nineteenth century, was rapidly increased until the walls of West College, the Library and elsewhere gave to the present a background of the past. Catalogues of the ex-

panding portrait gallery were published in 1951 and 1960. In 1940-1941, the Library building was enlarged as a reinforcement of the educational program as a whole, but with the inclusion of vaults and rooms for the rare book and manuscript collections which had been accumulating since the eighteenth century, but without adequate protection. One room was set aside for "Dickinsoniana," and in 1946 a curator was first appointed to organize and expand this department. In the following year, March 7, 1947, the Spahr Lecture series was inaugurated, with Lyman H. Butterfield as the speaker, and his subject, "Benjamin Rush and the Beginnings of 'John and Mary's College' over Susquehanna." Whitfield J. Bell, Jr., in making the introduction to the lecture and to the series, explained its title and purpose.

For it was no presumption which induced us to name these "Lectures in Americana." The history of Dickinson College does not begin and end at the campus wall. On the contrary Dickinson is an expression of the cultural life and aspirations of the American community; it has been a fruitful guardian of the intellectual life of the nation. Of this the College seal is a striking illustration—so simple, yet so full of meaning: the open Bible, supporting a telescope, the whole surmounted by a liberty cap, with the motto around it, "Religion and learning the bulwark of liberty." In that seal the whole intellectual climate of the late eighteenth century is brought into focus; no one can appreciate the original inspiration and purposes of the College unless he knows where Dickinson stood in the pattern of the eighteenth century enlightenment. Similarly the contributions of the College as an institution—I say nothing here of the contributions of its alumni—are intimately related to the life of America. Generally those contributions were good, as when Dr. Nisbet, almost by force of will alone, held this College together for twenty years and sent out a stream of lawyers, teachers and ministers to bring knowledge and discipline to the western country. Sometimes, to be sure, the College spoke in questionable voice, as when, in 1810, a resolution of the trustees against abolishing the death penalty in this Commonwealth was credited by the supporters of the measure with causing its defeat in the legislature. But, good or bad, the influence of the College in the nation was never negligible.

It has been in this spirit of understanding, of exact and impartial appraisal, that we have been advancing. Our pride lies in the meticulous, unprotected truth. Of all his inestimable gifts of time and thought and treasure this has been the most central, most vivid. He has raised walls and peopled them, has turned financial insecurity into strength, has brought in this place new height and power to the living scholarship of today. For Boyd Lee Spahr this spirit and these things all had their beginning in student days, in a student's interests, and in his love for his alma mater. It is a return, from one of her sons, which will be felt, and followed, and remembered, through all the years.

C. C. S.

The
HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE
of JOHN DICKINSON

H. TREVOR COLBOURN

November 14, 1958

H. Trevor Colbourn, Ph.D

A native of Australia, Dr. Colbourn was educated in England, and in the United States where he has lived since 1948. He holds degrees from London University, William and Mary College and the Johns Hopkins University. His special field of interest is Anglo-American intellectual history, particularly of the eighteenth century. In 1957-1958, as the first scholar to be appointed Fellow in American Studies by the Library Company of Philadelphia, he concentrated on the use of history in the establishment of American independence. His Spahr Lecture and subsequent articles mark the development of this research. Its completion will be realized in his book, CLIO AND THE AMERICAN REVOLUTION, soon to be published. Dr. Colbourn was a member of the History Department of the Pennsylvania State University from 1952 to 1959, and is now on the faculty of Indiana University. He was until recently one of the editors of THE HISTORIAN.

The

HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE

of JOHN DICKINSON

AMERICA has usually demanded at least two qualities of her most respected political heroes: that they be dead, and therefore unable to defend themselves; and that their patriotism be beyond any possible doubt. John Dickinson has never quite made the inner circle of our revered founding fathers. Jefferson, Sam and John Adams, the ubiquitous and omniscient Franklin, all are familiar enough as major contributors to American independence, and most have been awarded the ultimate accolade of vast scholarly editions of their writings issued in recent years. Indeed, for Jefferson such recognition has become an almost commonplace form of admiration. But Dickinson stands in vivid contrast, despite his Pennsylvania associations—which customarily assure some sort of historical recognition: he lacks both a modern biography and recent editorial attention.¹

Obviously Dickinson has not been denied such outward manifestations of national respect on account of any physical

¹ Charles Stillé's *The Life and Times of John Dickinson* was prepared at the request of the Historical Society of Pennsylvania and published by same in 1891; the same Philadelphians secured the services of Paul Leicester Ford to edit a projected three volumes of Dickinson *Writings*. Ford's untimely death was also the death of the project with only one volume published in

immortality. What has hurt Dickinson's reputation has been the questionable character of his patriotism: he is too well remembered as the non-signer of the Declaration of Independence. His earlier contributions to the American revolutionary cause, such as his *Letters from a Farmer* do not go unnoticed, but stand him in poor stead for this later illustration of the political power of negative thinking. In fact, it is likely that the very eloquence of Dickinson as a critic of British colonial conduct in the 1760s made his defection in July 1776 appear all the more reprehensible. Consistency in politicians may not be among their more conspicuous virtues, but Dickinson's seeming inconsistency has stretched the limits of popular toleration.

In these circumstances Dickinson has not enjoyed a very favorable historical press. He has generally emerged from the printed page of history as a rather shadowy figure of wealth and social eminence who may not have belonged to the patriot camp in the first place. To some he looks rather like another Daniel Dulany Jr., an ardent patriot until the political moment of truth in 1776. John C. Miller, for example, has defined Dickinson as "a conservative patriot" throughout the revolutionary period, with his conservatism seemingly conquering patriotism. Only in the 1760s, continues Miller, does Dickinson appear a true patriot, but his apparent radicalism then stems more from the very unrevolutionary nature of that decade. Thus, for Miller, Dickinson is always a conservative, and only takes on a misleadingly radical political hue against the backdrop of yet

1895. Dickinson himself edited two volumes of *Political Writings* (Wilmington, Del., 1801). There have been several Ph.D. dissertations, the best being by John H. Powell, "John Dickinson, Penman of the Revolution" (State University of Iowa, 1938), and David L. Jacobson, "John Dickinson and Joseph Galloway, 1764-1776: A Study in Contrasts" (Princeton University, 1959). It is known that Dr. Powell has a major Dickinson biography under way, and Leon deVallinger, State Archivist of Delaware, has long contemplated a modern definitive edition of Dickinson papers and has now announced formal intentions. Chances are that Dickinson will be the last of the revolutionary leadership to secure either a modern biography or edition of writings.

THE HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE OF JOHN DICKINSON

more conservative surroundings; as conditions changed and Dickinson failed to follow suit, his political utility ended. In Miller's view "American patriots had no reason to thank John Dickinson for his finespun theories and hair-splitting distinctions."²

Dickinson as a conservative seems to be a particularly common concept. Merrill Jensen readily admits Dickinson's importance as a framer of the first American constitution, but still associates Dickinson with those "other conservatives" who so strenuously sought home rule within the British Empire. While Professor Jensen does point out the vital distinction between imperial as opposed to domestic politics, Dickinson still seems to fit most comfortably in both the conservative categories.³ Nor have other recent investigators offered any violent disagreement. The best that a Princeton scholar has discovered for Dickinson is an occasional if grudging awareness of the inevitability of America's independence from England: if Dickinson was not a consistent conservative, then he was at best an undecided moderate.⁴

These rather tepid appraisals seem to support some of the earlier opinions of such elder historical statesmen as Moses Coit Tyler and Vernon Louis Parrington. "Both by nature and by culture," claimed Tyler, "John Dickinson was a conservative." Dickinson still appears with "an uncommon horror of all changes that violated the sequences of established law." "All his interests and all his tastes," Tyler continued, were "on the side of order, conservatism, and peace, if only with these could be had political safety and honor."⁵ Obviously Dickinson faced

² John C. Miller, *Origins of the American Revolution* (Boston, 1943), pp. 258-59.

³ Merrill Jensen, *The Articles of Confederation* (Madison, 1940), pp. 13, 57n.

⁴ Jacobson, "John Dickinson," p. 240.

⁵ Moses Coit Tyler, *Literary History of the American Revolution* (New York, 1897), II, 28; I, 235.

major problems in reconciling order, safety, and honor, but in the arduous struggle he managed to yet become Tyler's "penman of the American Revolution."⁶ Parrington, however, entered a firm dissent and claimed "a juster title, and more in accord with the facts, would be 'spokesman of the Colonial Whigs.'" For Parrington, Dickinson belonged always with middle class property-owners seeking political and legal recognition. "By temperament and breeding Dickinson was a conservative, and this native bias was emphasized by his English training in the law."⁷ Parrington believed the real revolutionaries were men addicted to extra-legal political speculation the like of which Dickinson never undertook: bad lawyers thus made good radicals; good lawyers made good conservatives; Jefferson and John Adams were poorly trained lawyers but good revolutionaries. Trained in England, Dickinson admired things English; Dickinson thus "seems to have remained placidly unaware of the sordid realities of parliamentary huckstering," and the only block to his becoming an excellent Tory was the English claim to a taxing power over the American colonies.⁸ The Stamp Act and the Townshend Duties struck Dickinson in his pocket book and he proclaimed his fervent Whig belief in the essential rights of property. Thus, concluded Parrington, Dickinson reluctantly and hesitantly moved into the patriot camp.⁹ In these circumstances it seems Dickinson's obstinacy over independence reflected a fundamental uneasiness with his political bedfellows.

This sampling of historical judgment indicates the limited frame of reference within which Dickinson is usually appraised. He has been too readily dismissed as a conservative or a moderate without adequate explanation of what such terms mean when

⁶ *Ibid.*, II, 24.

⁷ Vernon L. Parrington, *Main Currents in American Thought* (New York, 1930), I, 220, 222.

⁸ *Ibid.*, I, 223-25.

⁹ *Ibid.*, I, 226-28.

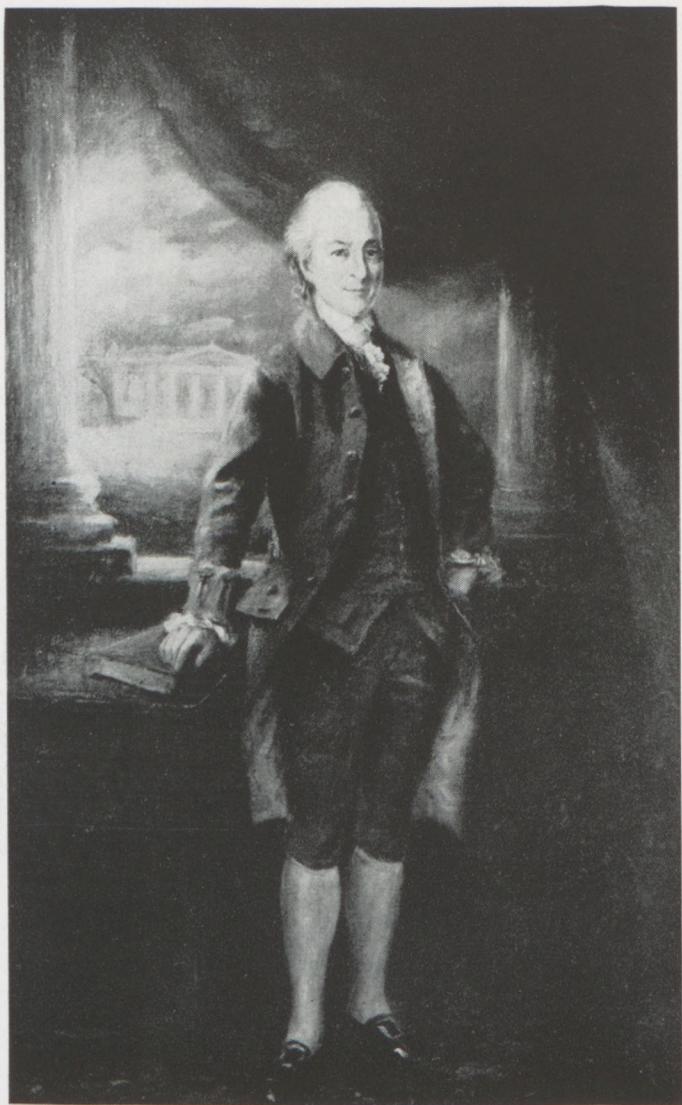


Photo by James F. Steinmetz

JOHN DICKINSON

From the painting attributed to William James Hubbard. The head is copied from the portrait by C. W. Peale. Gift of Boyd Lee Spahr to the Dickinsoniana Collection, 1949.

applied to either Dickinson personally or his generation. The time has surely come for a fresh appraisal of John Dickinson and the real measure of his contribution to American independence. It is appropriate to inquire just what was his true revolutionary role, if any. What kind of person really was "the mild, cultivated John Dickinson?"¹⁰ What was the outlook, the intellectual approach of the "conservative patriots" with whom Dickinson is so frequently identified? Was Dickinson just another alarmed property-owner, as Parrington has suggested? Were Dickinson's politics inconsistent? Did his real usefulness to the colonial cause cease with the end of the sane sixties and the arrival of the radical seventies, as John Miller has charged? Was Dickinson inherently an indecisive intellectual operating within a legalistic straitjacket, fearful of finality? Or was he, as Dickinson himself has modestly urged, a calmly courageous statesman who acted according to what he honestly believed best for his country, regardless of personal cost? Just why did Dickinson oppose independence? Is this the badge of the conservative patriot? In short, it is surely proper to inquire whether John Dickinson really deserves the oft-quoted description given by an angry John Adams—that "certain great Fortune and piddling Genius" who "has given a silly Cast to our whole Doings."¹¹

I

Unlike John Adams, John Dickinson was indeed born to great wealth and an established social position. But so were Thomas Jefferson and John Hancock; wealth and breeding were hardly the infallible clues to "piddling Genius." More relevant probably to Dickinson's politics was his personal inclination to caution and prudence. Even under the provocation of the Town-

¹⁰ Lawrence H. Gipson, *The Coming of the Revolution* (New York, 1954), p. 181.

¹¹ John Adams to James Warren, July 24, 1775 in *The Works of John Adams*, ed. by Charles Francis Adams (Boston, 1856), II, 411n.

shend Acts of 1767, Dickinson strongly warned against rash intemperate behavior: "We cannot act with too much caution in our disputes. Anger produces anger . . ." There was something Wilsonian in Dickinson's anxiety to maintain an almost Olympian calmness, to avoid personal involvement and loss of political sanity. He was convinced that "differences, that might be accommodated by kind and respectful behaviour can, by imprudence, be enlarged to an incurable rage."¹² He knew that enduring settlements do not come from emotional negotiators, and he also knew that no political party or faction enjoys a monopoly of virtue. To his mother Dickinson once inquired: "Which side shall an honest man espouse, where both are in the wrong?"¹³ Honesty, prudence, and moderation were Dickinson's constant goals. In a light-hearted letter to his friend Thomas McKean, Dickinson jokingly insisted that "moderation in every thing is the Source of Happiness." A man should watch his enthusiasms: "too much loving—too much Continence—too much of Law"—all threaten the balance of real pleasure and enduring satisfaction.¹⁴

In his general political and personal conduct Dickinson thus sought to steer a course which carefully avoided extremes. He was not always successful but perhaps he appears the more human for his failures: he did once angrily challenge Joseph Galloway to a duel in a fierce argument over internal Pennsylvania politics; and upon another more famous occasion Dickinson rounded upon a shocked John Adams with a "magisterial salutation."¹⁵ But these bad-tempered collisions attract attention partly because of their rarity. Dickinson, in brief, seems to amply warrant the

¹² *Writings of John Dickinson*, ed. Ford, p. 326.

¹³ Dickinson to his mother, August 2, 1756, Dickinson MSS, Library Company of Philadelphia (Lib. Co.). He was discussing the durable quarrel between the Penns and the provincial assembly of Pennsylvania.

¹⁴ Dickinson to Thomas McKean, June 8, 1762, McKean MSS, Historical Society of Pennsylvania (HSP).

¹⁵ *Works of John Adams*, ed., Adams, II, 410, Autobiography.

label of conservative in so far as his controlled public conduct is concerned. But the question still arises as to his conservatism in public policy. A plea for caution can be more illustrative of technique than principle, and Dickinson's basic political objectives were widely shared by many men who would never be considered conservative. "I am resolved to contend for the liberty delivered down to me by my ancestors," Dickinson repeatedly proclaimed.¹⁶ Throughout his life he disclosed how deeply he had been "affected by the Charms of liberty."¹⁷ But the cause of freedom, in Dickinson's eyes, was a cause "of too much dignity, to be sullied by turbulence and tumult." Rather unctuously he would urge that the proponents of liberty "should breathe a sedate yet fervent spirit, animating them to actions of prudence, justice, modesty, bravery, humanity, and magnanimity."¹⁸

Such recommendations clearly differed from the spirit breathed by a Jefferson who urged the bloody and frequent fertilization of the tree of liberty; and yet both men had similar objectives, and the effective political behavior of both men would indicate a closer intellectual kinship than their language sometimes suggests. Dickinson, like so many of his revolutionary contemporaries, was a well-trained practising lawyer. There is no reason to believe he was especially remarkable in either his training or his professional accomplishments. The reading-apprenticeship system of the day meant that whether a law student was directed by a James Putnam, a George Wythe, or a John Moland, the legal exposure was much the same. Dickinson was hardly alone in suffering the dreary wiles of Coke's *Institutes*,

¹⁶ *Writings of Dickinson*, ed. Ford, p. 406. Dickinson, like Jefferson, practiced economy with quotations he liked; this one, from Sallust, he first used in 1764 with a slight variation of words; see *ibid.*, p. 9.

¹⁷ Dickinson to McKean, March 4, 1801, McKean MSS, HSP.

¹⁸ *Writings of Dickinson*, ed. Ford, p. 324.

which served so widely as a general introduction to the study of antiquity as well as law.¹⁹

After beginning his legal training in the Philadelphia law office of John Moland, it was logical for Dickinson to continue his studies at Moland's *alma mater*, London's Middle Temple. In England he could and did study antiquity at first hand, reporting back to his father on wonderful walks along the same paths "frequented by the Antient Sages of the Law." With "awe and reverence" he contemplated the likelihood that he was studying "in the Chambers where Coke or Plowden has meditated." Yet Dickinson's awe was not for the mere visible signs of the English past; rather, he admired the ancient court rooms for their magnificent associations, and musingly drifted back to the time when "a Hampden, and a Holt opposed encroaching Power, and supported declining Justice."²⁰

As a young law student Dickinson developed his enduring taste for books. "Every Moment is an Age, till I am immersed in Study," was one report probably embroidered for parental consumption.²¹ Yet when the courts recessed there were few distractions, and Dickinson could relate on another occasion how "I am wholly taken up with reading—for as it is Vacation, there is nothing going on" ²² Even discounting the exaggerations of letters to anxious parents, Dickinson seems to have acquired steady reading habits, and later could not forebear occasional boasting on this score: his private library, he related, was "the most valuable part of my small estate," and the basic means of securing—in Dickinson's words—"a greater knowledge in history, and the laws and constitution of my own country, than is generally attained by men of my class."²³ The footnotes piled

¹⁹ See Stillé, *Dickinson*, Chapter II.

²⁰ Dickinson to his father, March 8, 1754, Dickinson MSS, Lib. Co.

²¹ *Ibid.*

²² Dickinson to his father, March 29, 1754, *ibid.*

²³ *Writings of Dickinson*, ed. Ford, p. 307.

upon footnotes in his published writings would indicate not only the reality of his reading, but also its political utility. As one contemporary observer remarked, Dickinson was indeed "a Scholar, and . . . a Man of extensive information."²⁴ The information upon which Dickinson drew in his political progress offers considerable insight to the real character of his conservative patriotism.

It is not hard to establish the sort of intellectual environment in which Dickinson lived. The books he bought for his library reflect his interests and in some instances were probably sources for his political ideas. We may lack a catalogue of the Dickinson library, but we do have sales slips from his booksellers which tell us, for example, just when Dickinson acquired William Blackstone's *Law Tracts* and *Commentaries*.²⁵ We may want for a detailed commonplace book of transcribed notes such as Jefferson bequeathed to an awed posterity, but we do have at least some jottings from Bolingbroke and Tacitus to confirm that Dickinson shared Jefferson's affection for both authors.²⁶ We also know that Dickinson's eagerness for reading extended to making an expensive purchase of a share in Franklin's Library Company in 1762, the same year he bought the *Law Tracts*.²⁷ Not the least of Dickinson's assets was access to, and inheritance of, the fabulous collection of his distinguished father-in-law Isaac Norris Jr., many of whose books now repose in the Dickinson College Library.²⁸ And finally, Dickinson's correspondence rounds out our useful knowledge of his political, legal, and historical in-

²⁴ "William Pierce on the Federal Convention of 1787," *American Historical Review*, III (1898), 329.

²⁵ David Hall's bills of sale are dated January 26, 1769 for the last volume of the *Commentaries* (volume I appeared 1765), and Dickinson bought the *Law Tracts* September 6, 1763; see Logan Papers, XXXIV, 54, 11, HSP.

²⁶ John Dickinson, Commonplace Book, pp. 69-72, MS in HSP.

²⁷ Dickinson paid £17 for his membership share; see Logan Papers, VIII, 63, HSP.

²⁸ James W. Phillips, "The Sources of the Original Dickinson College Library," *Pennsylvania History*, XIV (1947), 110-113. When John Adams vis-

formation; he is citing from Rapin's famous *History of England* as early as 1756 in letters home,²⁹ and on the eve of the revolution Dickinson is involved in a fascinating exchange with English publisher Edward Dilly over the merits of that handbook of independence, James Burgh's *Political Disquisitions*.³⁰ The intellectual context which Dickinson established for himself has real relevance to his political behavior, and illuminates a curious concept of conservatism, one which was also held by many of Dickinson's contemporaries.

Certainly Dickinson's reading tastes would seem to support Parrington's opinion that Dickinson was disinterested in political philosophy; and yet Dickinson's quiet convictions on "the Charms of liberty" suggest that the natural God-given rights of man was an assumption upon which political ideas had to be based. But trained as a lawyer, Dickinson usually preferred to look on liberty with a legal perspective. "Let us think like freemen," he would urge.³¹ A freeman under English law had specific rights. Indeed, Sir Edward Coke's *Institutes* were largely concerned with spelling out what such rights were, tracing their ancient derivation from "time out of mind," back in the dusty documents of English antiquity and far beyond recorded history.³² Dickinson's legal authorities were heavily historical in their orientation, and when many of them were writing in the seventeenth century, they had important political purposes which thoughtful discoveries of precedents could serve magnificently.

ited Dickinson "at his seat at Fair Hill," Adams observed "a very fine library . . . most of his books were collected by Mr. Norris, once Speaker of the House here." See *Works of John Adams*, ed. Adams, II, 379.

²⁹ Dickinson to his mother, June 6, 1756, Dickinson MSS, Lib. Co.

³⁰ James Burgh, *Political Disquisitions* (London, 1774-75); the three volume set sent by Dilly is in Lib Co., with Burgh's inscription to Dickinson, offered "As a Small Token of Respect for His Patriotic Virtue."

³¹ *Writings of Dickinson*, ed. Ford, p. 499.

³² For an interesting recent study of Coke as an ancient historian, see J. G. A. Pocock, *The Ancient Constitution and the Feudal Law* (Cambridge, England, 1957), chapter III.

If rights claimed on behalf of Parliament against the Stuarts could be found in extreme antiquity, then the popular cause no longer looked radical. On the contrary, in the peculiar perspective supplied by many lawyers in seventeenth-century England, the pretensions of the Stuart kings appeared as encroachments and innovations at the expense of parliamentary traditions. Coke, in exalting common law, depicted charters as mere confirmations of ancient legal privilege. Magna Carta itself was only "declaratory of the principal grounds of the fundamental laws of England," and thus involved nothing new.³³ The interest in antiquity evident in the seventeenth century was naturally enhanced by the political utility of such history. Even John Locke, a non-lawyer, was suitably impressed; history, he observed, was now "the great Mistress of Prudence and civil knowledge."³⁴

In this setting, history and law joined hands to sanctify the Glorious Revolution in 1688, a struggle in which the only real issue was the "ancient *Rights and Privileges*" of the Commons.³⁵ In Dickinson's historical experience, the English revolutions against Charles I and James II were very logical and unrevolutionary developments in which Parliament justly moved to restore its former privileges and rights. Unfortunately Parliament threatened to become as tyrannical and as unconstitutional in its behavior as the monarchs it had moved against. Dickinson dipped frequently into his copy of *Cato's Letters* for information on conditions in eighteenth-century England. Here he could read of the unrepresentative nature of the House of Commons, elected by "little beggarly Boroughs" which were "Pools of Corruption."³⁶ And notwithstanding Parrington's assertion to the

³³ Sir Edward Coke, *Institutes of the Laws of England* (London, 1681), II, Proeme, n.p.

³⁴ John Locke, *Some Thoughts Concerning Education*, ed. by R. H. Quick (Cambridge, England, 1892), p. 159.

³⁵ John Trenchard and Thomas Gordon, *Cato's Letters* (London, 1748), I, 97, 117, III, 18.

³⁶ Sir Robert Atkyns, *The Power, Jurisdiction, and Privilege of Parliament*

contrary, Dickinson knew whereof *Cato's Letters* spoke: when studying law in London, Dickinson felt obliged to write home about contemporary politics which he described as "one of the greatest Proofs perhaps of the Corruption of the Age." His view from London in 1755 persuaded him that "bribery is so common that it is thot there is not a Borough in England where it is not practis'd." ³⁷

Not surprisingly Dickinson came to feel that the disappointing English political condition had real relevance for the study of imperial relations. England's colonial conduct was not likely to be either farsighted or selfless when dominated by ministers preoccupied with pensions and places. It was apparently in vain that *Cato's Letters* had warned of the necessity for good sense and restraint in colonial policy: there were, "Cato" had declared, two ways in which to maintain an empire and retain colonies: "to keep independence out of their power, and to keep independence out of their will." American growth and British misrule threatened both devices. Obviously no country or colony would "continue their Subjection to another, only because their Great Grandmothers were acquainted." ³⁸ Significantly Dickinson agreed with these sentiments sufficiently to quote them as early as 1765, and again in 1768. Independence may not have been Dickinson's will, but it could hardly be out of his mind when uttering such warnings. ³⁹

II

The gift of hindsight is a mixed blessing for the student of John Dickinson. In the 1760s, when Dickinson made his

(London, 1689), p. 33. Widely read in colonial America, Isaac Norris ordered his copy in 1754; HSP has the original order.

³⁷ Dickinson to ? [probably his father], January 25, 1755, Dickinson MSS, Lib. Co.

³⁸ Trenchard and Gordon, *Cato's Letters*, III, 7.

³⁹ See Dickinson's *Late Regulations Respecting the British Colonies*, and *Letters from a Farmer*, in *Writings*, ed., Ford, pp. 242-43, 342-43.

political debut in Pennsylvania, there was no reason to assume that the newly-won British Empire would not endure indefinitely. Dickinson's colonial ancestors had always known and enjoyed their British connection, and Dickinson's contemporaries were no exception. It is worth recalling that there was as yet no general sense of the inevitability of American independence, and certainly no expectation of success in the highly unlikely event of an all-out war with the mother country. American colonies might have occasion to question the political and economic health of England at the end of the war with France in 1763, but there was no immediate cause to question England's survival as the seat of the world's most spectacular Empire.

In this context, Dickinson's first political battle assumes a most interesting complexion. It was, of course, over an issue which seemingly involved Pennsylvania politics rather than imperial relations: should Pennsylvania continue as a proprietary province of the Penns, or should that family be overthrown and Pennsylvania secure a royal charter as a Crown colony? Franklin and Galloway were eager for such a change; Dickinson stalwartly led the opposition. It is easy to hail Dickinson's response as typically conservative and a useful clue to later political conduct. And both suggestions are partly justified. Dickinson's support of the embattled Penns does lend itself comfortably to the concept of men of wealth and property sticking together, resisting all change. But Dickinson's motivation was singularly different from the outward appearance: he did not believe the proprietary arrangement particularly attractive; but at least the evils of Penn mal-administration were familiar. Dickinson was deeply suspicious of a closer attachment to the Crown, such as would be inevitable if Pennsylvania became a royal province. He frankly feared his colonial colleagues might well leap from the proprietary frying pan into the royal fire. He recalled publicly previous examples of unwise political haste: how, as Robert Molesworth related in his *Account of Denmark*, "the commons of

Denmark, smarting under the tyranny of their nobility, in a fit of vengeful fury *suddenly* surrendered their liberties to their king; and ever since . . . have detested the *mad moment* which slipt upon them the shackles of slavery." He remembered from Rapin's *History of England* the precipitate uprising of the Duke of Monmouth against James II, and compared it with the revolution led by William of Orange, who "with a *wise delay*, pursued the same views and gloriously mounted a throne" in 1688.⁴⁰

To the extent that Dickinson opposed change in 1764, he was assuredly conservative. But to the extent that he opposed a move which would bring his province closer to an English government he distrusted, he was behaving in a highly patriotic and far-sighted manner. Already Dickinson was disclosing his concern with the lessons of the past as guides to the future maintenance of colonial liberties; and already Dickinson was revealing another anxiety which later obscured his patriotic intentions—a concern over the essential timing of political action. He looked for greater caution than his colleagues; he was too conscious of the past, too aware of previously ill-timed efforts at change, too anxious for complete preparation and thus assured success; he lacked, in brief, the gambling instinct vital to a successful politician. But he was undoubtedly a careful and vigorous patriot who sought liberty above all; if a temporary support of the *status quo* was one way of more surely advancing to the ultimate goal, then Dickinson would endorse a Pennsylvania administration with which he was far from satisfied.

When confronted with direct evidence of the undesirability of closer contact with England, Dickinson was eloquent and outspoken. The Stamp Act of 1765 saw Dickinson play a prominent role in the colonial protest against taxation by England. He was the effective draftsman of the Stamp Act Resolves passed by the Pennsylvania Assembly in September, and his bluntly stated

⁴⁰ *Writings of Dickinson*, ed., Ford, p. 24.

position was far from conservative in the usual sense of the abused word. As a good lawyer, he appealed directly to the legal rights of Pennsylvanians as confirmed in their provincial constitution. Such a frame of government merely declared what all men knew: that Americans derived their liberties from their natural God-given rights and from the privileges established for all Englishmen in the English constitution. Dickinson's legal and historical background enabled him to appeal confidently to what ought to be "the noble Principles of *English* Liberties" as a basis for the exclusive colonial right to tax themselves.⁴¹ He repeated the same theme when he drafted the Resolutions of the Stamp Act Congress in October 1765: English colonists, claimed Dickinson, were essentially Englishmen entitled to the rights of Englishmen. Americans "are as free as his [George III's] subjects in *Great Britain*." The only British legislation to be obeyed in America was such as the colonists chose to obey—namely "acts of parliament, not inconsistent with the principles of freedom." This was the limit set by Dickinson on what was called "all due Subordination to that august Body the Parliament of Great Britain."⁴²

Dickinson's opening salvo was not fired in haste. He did not suddenly abandon his attachment to caution and prudence upon news of the Stamp Act. He argued for an American position in which he believed both law and history joined to substantiate. He took no half-way house of internal versus external taxes, but insisted from the outset that all English taxation of the colonies would be unjust, illegal, and unconstitutional. He made clear that he was only claiming for Americans what was theirs if they were in England, "Rights and Liberties, thus vested in their Ancestors, and transmitted to their Posterity." Indeed, Dickinson was in 1765 far to the left of the public position of either Daniel

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 173-74.

⁴² *Ibid.*, pp. 183-84.

Dulany Jr. or Benjamin Franklin, who readily distinguished between external and internal taxes; even the Stamp Act Congress found Dickinson too assertive of the colonial cause, and struck out his use of the word "Rights" from the formal petition he drafted protesting the Stamp Act to the King.⁴³

In his petition Dickinson insisted that the only colonial connection with England was one "of affection." The colonists he likened to the "dutiful children" of a beloved if errant parent country; as such, Americans resented undeserved punishment, and the ties of ancestral affection were severely strained. He piously hoped for enlightenment on the parental part, so that the imperial family might continue to thrive and prosper. But the inferences were plain enough: England in Dickinson's legal opinion had no valid claim over Englishmen in America, except when the colonists were generously disposed to allow it. The only ties binding the empire were ties of sentiment and emotion, ties which were peculiarly fragile. And while Americans on this occasion were behaving mildly, as irritated but tolerant children afflicted with an irrational mother country, children did have a habit of growing up; as *Cato's Letters* had put it, colonists' independence could only be avoided by the mother country "*using them well.*"⁴⁴ Dickinson took care to remind England of the dangers she was courting, and phrased his warnings in exceptionally vigorous language. His position was still conservative in the sense that he wanted no change in the earlier relations with England; he was conservative in the sense that he still enjoyed and appreciated the empire of which he was a member; he was conservative in emphasizing the essential Englishness of his position: "I glory in my relation to [Great Britain]," he announced, adding for good measure: "every drop of blood in my heart is British."⁴⁵ Dickinson's peculiar political problem was really that

⁴³ *Ibid.*, p. 194.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 244, 242.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 267.

he was more English than either King or Parliament. He knew what his rights should be. He did not look for change. The innovations derived directly from an ignorant and misinformed British administration, and at least one of Dickinson's major responsibilities now became the enlightenment of George III and his Ministers.

The Townshend Acts of 1767 were the occasion for Dickinson's most sustained effort at such enlightenment. In his *Letters from a Farmer* Dickinson carefully reviewed the historical and legal basis of the colonial case against the new revenue measures. He readily acknowledged that the Townshend Duties were technically trade regulatory provisions, and he also conceded that there was an extended history of British trade regulations which had been accepted in America. Measures solely concerned with trade drew no objections: "such an authority is essential to the relations between a mother country and her colonies." Indeed the regulation of imperial trade was one area of power Dickinson would not deny England; such power, he felt, was "necessary for the common good of all." But of course this also meant that trade regulations had to be for the common good, and not for the purpose of raising unconstitutional taxes at colonial expense.

Dickinson flatly denied parliamentary authority to construe trade measures into taxation. The Townshend Duties sought just this, and thus created "an innovation; and a most dangerous innovation."⁴⁶ On British encroachments of this sort Dickinson was consistently outspoken: he denied totally "the power of parliament to lay upon these colonies any 'tax' whatever."⁴⁷ He reviewed the rights of Englishmen claimed at the Stamp Act Congress in 1765, and questioned the British observance of these rights at home as well as in colonial legislation. He mentioned the "many daring and wicked ministers," the "tumultuous and

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 312-16.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 328.

bold parliaments," the "ambition, avarice, faction, tyranny," recently revealed on the English political stage.⁴⁸ But at the same time he recalled that "there is no other people mentioned in history . . . who have been so constantly watchful of their liberty, and so successful in their struggle for it, as the *English*." ⁴⁹ He also conceded "that a strong spirit of liberty subsists at present in *Great-Britain*." ⁵⁰ There was both continued evidence of the proper colonial derivation of their claims as Englishmen and hope for suitable respect for such rights.

Yet Dickinson also knew that liberty could hardly survive on optimism alone. There might be Englishmen who shared the ideals of Catherine Macaulay and James Burgh, but Dickinson extended his innate caution to any estimate of their strength and numbers. The present dubious condition of the mother country was additional cause for colonial vigilance: "when an act injurious to freedom has been *once* done, and the people *bear* it, the *repetition* of it is most likely to meet with *submission*." ⁵¹ Dickinson was clearly anxious lest the Townshend Duties become a dangerous precedent for worse measures to come. He was already determined on maximum resistance to Britain on this issue, and had nothing but scorn for faint-hearted men urging appeasement to British power:

What can such men design? What do their grave observations amount to, but this—that these colonies, totally regardless of their liberties, should commit them, with humble resignation, to *chance, time, and the tender mercies of ministers*.' ⁵²

Not that Dickinson favored bloody civil war—seven years before it came—but rather was he convinced that an undeviating show of resistance would bring desired concessions from the British

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 335.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 388.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 393.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 388-89.

⁵² *Ibid.*, p. 323.

government. After all, the Stamp Act had been concluded with "its successful issue." War was as distasteful as it was unlikely, and prudence was still Dickinson's political theme: "hot, rash, disorderly proceedings, injure the reputation of a people . . . without procuring them the least benefit."⁵³

At this stage in the imperial argument Dickinson was yet prepared to show tolerance as well as patience toward his mother country. Did not "every government at some time or other" fall "into wrong measures?" Experience again demonstrated that "harsh methods cannot be proper, till milder ones have failed." Then, and only then, counseled Dickinson, when a clear purpose "is formed to annihilate the liberties of the governed," should armed resistance be undertaken. As of 1768, Dickinson preferred to place his hopes in political and economic forms of persuasion. He might indulge in some vigorous rhetoric—"there are things, which, at some times, even *slaves* will not bear"⁵⁴—but he also liked to recall that "several of his Majesty's present ministers are good men, and friends to our country."⁵⁵ For the present Dickinson was content with the role of colonial watchman, alerting his fellow-citizens to their dangers, appealing to England's sense of constitutional and historical justice, and looking hopefully to the preservation of the Empire.⁵⁶ But underlying the Dickinsonian optimism was a deep-seated sense of alarm, an awareness that petitions and non-importation agreements might not prove sufficient; in which case all hopes of colonial survival would depend heavily upon the measure of colonial unity. "Never let us forget that our Strength depends on our Union, and our Liberty on our Strength," was Dickinson's warning in the spring of 1768.⁵⁷ He was pleading for the prop-

⁵³ *Ibid.*, p. 324.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 393.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 404.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 406.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 417.

erty rights of English freemen, and he was determined that Americans should work together for their inherited privileges.

III

John Dickinson's conduct in the 1760s was unquestionably patriotic; and his concept of American rights unquestionably derived from a cautious and conservative approach to politics. But in this he was hardly unique. His attachment to the past, to the common law which he called "the Birthright of Englishmen, and the safeguard of their Persons and Properties,"⁵⁸ was an attachment equally familiar among New England and Southern patriots. Even the so-called radical patriot John Adams on the eve of independence was insisting that "the patriots of this province desire nothing new; they wish only to keep their old privileges."⁵⁹ Dickinson's approach was widely shared; in the colonial perspective of the time conservatism and patriotism became virtually synonymous. Dickinson was patriotically seeking to conserve his political and legal heritage: "in FREEDOM we're BORN, and in FREEDOM we'll LIVE," ran the lyrics of the "song for American freedom" that Dickinson sent to James Otis in July 1768.⁶⁰

Dickinson's role in these critical years leading up to the revolution did not undergo serious change. His beliefs held firm, but so did his anxiety for adequate colonial union and preparation for the defence of such beliefs. He persisted in his studies of the English historical and political circumstances. He reviewed Tacitus' *Germania* on former English liberties, and deplored the fact that modern English descendants of the original German emigrants to England now found in America "*arbitrary Government and a standing army pursuing them even unto these woods.*"⁶¹ He grew increasingly concerned over the menace pre-

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 195.

⁵⁹ *Boston Gazette*, March 13, 1775.

⁶⁰ *Writings of Dickinson*, ed., Ford, p. 431.

⁶¹ Dickinson, *Essay on Constitutional Power* (Philadelphia, 1774), p. 66n.

sented by the British army in America, and consulted Rapin on the duplicity of Henry VII in introducing such an army into England in the first place.⁶² He studied anew the melancholy history of previous English tyrants, monarchs who, like George III, sought "an unconstitutional power." He noted the dismaying unreliability of the English in their protracted flirtation with their ancestral liberties, and cited the cases of Charles II and James II who violated the "*express rights of their subjects*."⁶³ He enjoyed a stimulating correspondence with Edward Dilly, who wrote at length on the contemporary decadence of English political life, telling of the "Bribery and Corruption . . . [which] engenders Swarms of Placemen and Pensioners . . . [who] like Leeches suck the very vitals of the Constitution."⁶⁴

The copies of Burgh's *Political Disquisitions* which accompanied Dilly's letters conveyed essentially the same message: Dickinson's generation was witness to "the subversion of the constitution, and the ruin of the state."⁶⁵ Burgh discussed in fine detail the historic dangers from standing armies, "the arts of wicked ministers and favorites," and the right "of redress by the people, when government refuses it." Americans, Dickinson was told, were indeed transplanted Englishmen, entitled to the same rights and liberties. In fact, claimed Burgh, American rights were really English rights, and the American resistance was beneficial to England as well as America: if "the *American* charters may be destroyed, the charters of all the [English] cities . . . may be annihilated."⁶⁶ Burgh's views frequently coincided with Dickinson's—which might explain the latter's readiness to subscribe to the Philadelphia edition of the *Disquisitions*, despite

⁶² *Writings of Dickinson*, ed. Ford, pp. 390-91.

⁶³ Dickinson, *Essay*, p. 40.

⁶⁴ Edward Dilly to Dickinson, March 7, 1774, Dickinson MSS, Lib. Co.

⁶⁵ Burgh, *Disquisitions*, I, viii, xvi, xxii-xxiii.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, II, 319; see II, 274-340 for a discussion of colonial grievances; Burgh's phrasing frequently suggests he has recently read Dickinson's *Letters from a Farmer*—see II, 291 for example.

already owning Dilly's set. By 1774 Dickinson was offering the interesting argument that "we should be guilty of treason against our sovereign and the majesty of the people of *England*, if we did not oppose [tyranny]." Political conditions in England were now seen as so unfavorable to liberty that only Englishmen in America were likely to preserve such ancient rights as had been affirmed by King John in Magna Carta and demanded of the Stuarts in the seventeenth century. "*England*," Dickinson now insisted, "must be saved in *America*." In time "she will *rejoice* that we have *resisted*—and *thank* us for having *offended* her." ⁶⁷

If history was not repeating itself precisely, at least Dickinson could see certain fascinating parallels: England in the 1770s was fast becoming as despotic as she had been under the Stuarts, with the added danger that Parliament had become a pensioned creature of the Crown. If Americans failed to persist in their resistance to British tyranny, they would be placed in the same situation to which the English people would have been reduced "had *James* the first and his family succeeded in their scheme of arbitrary power." Indeed, concluded Dickinson, if only one would substitute the Stuarts for Parliament, and Britons for Americans, the arguments used in the seventeenth-century contests "apply with inexpressible force and appositeness in maintenance of our cause, and in refutation of the pretensions set up by their too forgetful posterity, over their unhappy colonists." ⁶⁸ If modern Englishmen in the mother country had forgotten their obligations and their ancestral freedom, then Englishmen in America had not: "we are," said Dickinson firmly in 1774, "*British Subjects*, who are born to Liberty, who know its Worth, and who prize it high." ⁶⁹

In 1774 Dickinson became increasingly aware of the potential problems in maintaining English liberties in America. Recent

⁶⁷ Dickinson, *Essay*, p. 62n.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 70-79.

⁶⁹ *Writings of Dickinson*, ed. Ford, p. 460.

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oppressions forced Dickinson to the conclusion that all the constitutional rights of Americans were destroyed, and "the modes of opposition for relief so contracted, as to leave . . . the miserable alternative of supplication or violence."⁷⁰ The First Continental Congress resolved on supplication as an initial venture, and Dickinson penned a vigorous petition to the King, listing the acts of parliamentary oppression suffered by innocent Americans, and appealing for "peace, liberty, and safety." Dickinson made clear that he did not consider himself a revolutionary in any sense—the British occupied that invidious position—but Americans only wanted their established liberties: "we wish not a diminution of the prerogative," explained Dickinson, "nor do we solicit the grant of any new right in our favor."⁷¹

What expectations of success filled Dickinson's mind as he framed this petition can only be guessed at. The Coercive Acts had been a sobering development, and while Dickinson wished "for peace ardently," as he confessed to Arthur Lee, peace, if it came, "will come more grateful by being unexpected."⁷² There were moments when he found it hard to believe that supposedly intelligent Englishmen could "seriously think of sheathing their swords in bosoms so affectionate to them," or that England would embrace a war "that instantly must produce such deficiencies in her revenue [and] expose her to her natural enemies." England might be politically sick, but surely she must see that civil war "will involve her in immediate ruin"? British ministerial stupidity was such that Dickinson wondered whether "a design is regularly prosecuted by the ministry, to make his Majesty dethrone himself by the calamities and convulsions his reign is likely to bring on his whole people."⁷³

⁷⁰ Dickinson, *Political Writings*, I, 336-37.

⁷¹ *Journals of the Continental Congress, 1774-1789*, ed. by W. C. Ford (Washington, D.C., 1906), I, 119.

⁷² Dickinson to Arthur Lee, August 20, 1774, Duane Papers, American Philosophical Society (APS).

⁷³ *Ibid.*

Faced with such apparent British obtuseness, Dickinson found some satisfaction in the resolution of his fellow countrymen. They were, he reported to Josiah Quincy, "very firm." Approvingly he observed that "our Country People . . . look to the last Extremity with Spirit. It is right that they should—if they will submit their resentments to the Guidance of Reason" ⁷⁴—possibly as provided by colonial leaders like Quincy and Dickinson. This sort of remark did not mean that Dickinson favored war now; he still felt common sense dictated a continued imperial association, and most of his colleagues agreed on the desirability of reconciliation. But lacking needed British moderation, "the last Extremity" had to be viewed with some equanimity, and New Englanders in the First Congress found themselves in general agreement with Dickinson. Sam Adams spent a September afternoon and evening with Dickinson, and rather rhapsodically awarded him the highest accolade: Dickinson, Sam told Joseph Warren, was "a true Bostonian." ⁷⁵ And Dickinson also played host to Sam's cousin John Adams, who confided to his diary: "a most delightful afternoon we had; sweet communion indeed, we had. Mr. Dickinson gave us his thoughts and his correspondence freely." As of 1774 at least, John Adams could find little but praise for the "modest," "ingenious," and agreeable Pennsylvanian. "He has an excellent heart," Adams concluded, "and the cause of his country lies near it." ⁷⁶ According to John Adams' investigation, the most that Dickinson would concede Britain was "the regulation of trade upon principles of necessity." ⁷⁷ While Adams might question the need for even this concession, he saw that Dickinson was essentially repeating a thesis announced nearly ten years earlier: that British authority in America

⁷⁴ Dickinson to Josiah Quincy Jr., June 20, 1774, Massachusetts Historical Society (MHS).

⁷⁵ Samuel Adams to Joseph Warren, September 25, 1774, *The Writings of Samuel Adams*, (New York, 1904-08), ed. by Harry A. Cushing, III, 158.

⁷⁶ September 12, 1774, Diary, *Works of John Adams*, ed. Adams, II, 379.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*

was only what the colonists were generously prepared to allow. Few New Englanders would dispute such a contention.

However the succeeding year—1775—was a fateful one for Dickinson's political reputation generally and for John Adams' attitude to Dickinson specifically. In April and June came the fighting at Lexington, Concord, and Bunker Hill; for most New Englanders there could no longer be hesitation over the future course of American action. Where there had been a multitude of well-publicized appeals to the King in 1774 to rid himself of evil ministers and take action against a pernicious Parliament, the bloodshed in Massachusetts made such approaches obsolete. For men like Dickinson, who did not want to fight and who had still hoped for British concessions as had been secured previously in 1766 and 1770, the chances of effective reconciliation seemed slim indeed. "What topics of reconciliation are now left for men who think as I do?" asked Dickinson dispiritedly. "Will the distinctions between the prince and his ministers, between the people and their representatives, wipe out the stain of blood?"⁷⁸ Obviously any such distinction as existed in 1774 was now irretrievably lost.

In this situation Dickinson was to become involved with two important Congressional documents which in turn led to a political reaction from which he is still suffering. While Dickinson's real expectations of reconciliation had been dealt a death blow by Britain, he still nourished faint hopes for some sort of political miracle. He also realized that if no miracle took place, the American colonies needed a degree of leadership and organization thus far absent. Colonial unity would be an essential ingredient in successful American resistance to British encroachments. Accordingly Dickinson undertook to support two strategic pronouncements in July 1775: the one would be a last agonizing

⁷⁸To Arthur Lee, April 29, 1775, *American Archives*, ed. by Peter Force (Washington, D. C., 1837-53), *Fourth Series*, II, 445-446.

appeal to George III to end the bloodshed and work for the repair of his ravaged Empire; and the other would be a domestic declaration summing up the reasons for colonial armed resistance to the mother country.

Despite Dickinson's vital participation in both documents he is still primarily associated with the famous Olive Branch Petition which so aroused John Adams' anger. At least one recent writer has suggested the Olive Branch was really a fraud perpetrated upon a reluctant Congress,⁷⁹ but the Second Continental Congress was not easily hoodwinked, and it accorded a majority vote to the Petition over John Adams' protests. Thomas Johnson Jr. spoke for the Congressional majority when he explained his political objectives as

in the first place to establish our liberties; our second wish is, a reunion with Great Britain; so may we preserve the empire entire, and the constitutional liberty, founded in whiggish principles, handed down to us by our ancestors.

He well knew the likelihood of royal rejection of such a petition, and looked for such action to strengthen the pro-American group in England, and to demonstrate to "our very moderate men on this side of the water" the obvious necessity of "opposing force by force."⁸⁰ Dickinson knew the need for the strength that could come only from colonial unity. His petition could therefore have only beneficial results: it gave the King one last opportunity for redress of American grievances, the first real opportunity since the Concord *débâcle*; and the mildness of the Olive Branch under obvious provocations lent an air of injured innocence to the Congress which could only reflect credit on its membership. Americans thus announced their continued desire for "permanent reconciliation," but also pointedly urged measures "for prevent-

⁷⁹ John R. Alden, *The American Revolution* (New York, 1954), p. 29.

⁸⁰ Thomas Johnson Jr. to Horatio Gates, August 18, 1775, *Letters of Members of the Continental Congress*, ed. by Edmund C. Burnett (Washington, D. C., 1921), I, 190.

ing the further destruction of the lives of your Majesty's subjects." ⁸¹

John Adams' anger at the Petition derived especially from its purposeful humility of expression. As Dickinson admitted, he had made no mention of claims or rights in this document: nothing would be thus gained on this occasion. He reminded Arthur Lee that "our rights have been already stated, our claims made; war is actually begun, and we are carrying it on vigorously . . . our spirits are not lowered." But, if the King was at all eager to stop "the effusion of *British* blood, the opportunity is now offered to them." If the British had no such inclination, if they continue to treat American claims with contempt, no matter how gently urged, then "the more such treatment will confirm the minds of our countrymen to endure all the misfortunes that may attend the contest." ⁸² As a move in the chess game of diplomacy and propaganda, Dickinson's Olive Branch deserved more respect than John Adams was prepared to give it. Dickinson does not emerge as an exponent of the peace-at-any-price school; rather he reveals an interesting bellicosity at this time, making a satisfied reference to Bunker's Hill, "when a mere carnage was made of the Royalists." ⁸³

It is hard to resist the conclusion that there must have been more to the Adams-Dickinson conflict than is presently known; certainly Adams' account of the clash hardly explains its bitterness. According to Adams his opposition to the Petition led to a violent encounter with an irate Dickinson who threatened

If you don't concur with us in our pacific system, I and a number of us will break off from you in New England, and we will carry on the opposition by ourselves in our own way.⁸⁴

⁸¹ Second Petition from Congress to the King, July 8, 1775, *The Papers of Thomas Jefferson*, ed. by Julien P. Boyd et al. (Princeton, 1950-), I, 222.

⁸² Dickinson to Arthur Lee, July 7, 1775, *American Archives*, ed., Peter Force, *Fourth Series*, II, 1604.

⁸³ *Ibid.*

⁸⁴ Autobiography, 1775, *Works of John Adams*, ed. Adams, II, 410.

Adams professed shock at Dickinson's conduct, and angrily attacked the Olive Branch as "this measure of imbecility."

From this point it was not far to Adams' celebrated letter to James Warren castigating Dickinson as that "piddling Genius whose Fame has been trumpeted so loudly" and whose caution was delaying Congressional prosecution of the war effort. In Adams' eyes all-out war should precede efforts at petitions and negotiations—this would have been "the soundest policy."⁸⁵ And yet with singular inconsistency, Adams had a few weeks earlier conceded the need for a greater degree of colonial unity: again to James Warren, he declared that "Discord and total Disunion would be the certain Effect of a resolute Refusal to petition and negotiate"; such manoeuvres might at least furnish time to marshal "Powder and Arms."⁸⁶

Adams' view of the "piddling Genius" who was responsible for the Olive Branch has seemingly diverted attention from the Dickinson who partly wrote and certainly endorsed the Declaration on Arms. It is true that Jefferson supplied the rough draft, but it is also true that Dickinson was largely responsible for the form approved by the Congress—just two days before the Olive Branch.⁸⁷ Certainly Dickinson's language in this document lacked the humility for which the Olive Branch was attacked. He referred to the blindness and inordinate passion for power of Parliament. He discussed the "ministerial rapacity" and the "tyranny of irritated Ministers." He exalted the freedom in-

⁸⁵ John Adams to James Warren, July 24, 1775, *ibid.*, II, 411n.

⁸⁶ John Adams to James Warren, June [July] 6, 1775, *Warren-Adams Letters* (Massachusetts Historical Society Collections, LXII, Boston, 1917), I, 75.

⁸⁷ There is an excellent discussion of the Dickinson-Jefferson contributions in *Jefferson Papers*, ed. Boyd, I, 187-192; there is little significance in the divergence between the Jefferson draft's version of colonists coming to America, creating their governments, and then forming compacts with the English Crown, and the Dickinson concept of colonists forming governments under Crown charters. Neither man differed substantially on the essential rights of Americans as Englishmen, and both used charters, historical, and natural rights

herited "from our gallant Ancestors," and the obligation to deliver succeeding generations from "that Wretchedness which inevitably Awaits them" if British bondage should be allowed descent. And he rounded out his declamation with the magnificently brief statements of colonial condition and intent: "Our Cause is just. Our Union is perfect. Our preparations nearly completed. Our internal Resources are great; and our Assurance of Foreign Aid is certain." American patriots were resolved "to dye free men rather than live slaves."⁸⁸

This noble Declaration enjoyed at least one common denominator with the Olive Branch: reconciliation with England was still a colonial war aim. Americans were fighting aggression, and not with "ambitious Designs of separating from Great Britain."⁸⁹ But obviously reconciliation with an active tyrant might be difficult to arrange; insistence upon reconciliation was clearly to disarm domestic and foreign critics who erroneously thought Americans were the rebels rather than encroaching royal administration. By the end of July 1775 the Congress had rejected North's conciliation plan, and by November learned of the royal rejection of the Olive Branch; the King had failed to realize that *he* was guilty of rebelling against American rights, and proclaimed his colonies to be in a state of open rebellion. As Dickinson told the New Jersey assembly in December, it was now tragically clear that "neither Mercy nor Justice was to be expected from Britain."⁹⁰

arguments with considerable freedom and ease. Jefferson was more concerned with antiquity, feudalism, and Saxon liberties than Dickinson who put more emphasis upon the lessons of the seventeenth century. Both men attacked parliamentary pretensions in 1774, and both appealed to George III to remember his historical obligations; both also insisted that English authority in America was essentially what Americans declared it to be; and both men were blessed with an amazing felicity of writing style which achieved a unique blend in the Declaration on Arms.

⁸⁸ Declaration on Arms, Dickinson's Composition Draft, *Jefferson Papers*, ed. Boyd, I, 204-12.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, I, 212.

⁹⁰ *Documents Relating to the Colonial History of the State of New Jersey*,

Dickinson's immediate task was to give meaning to the high-flying phrases he had used in the Declaration on Arms: the American union was yet far from perfect, the colonial preparations for defense were inadequate, and assurance of foreign aid just did not exist. The publication of Tom Paine's incendiary *Common Sense* in January 1776 distressed Dickinson because it urged a decision and a program for which America was not yet organized. Dickinson admitted general agreement with Paine, but strongly questioned the wisdom of an immediate independence from England; independence, according to Dickinson in late April or early May of 1776, "ought to be the child of Necessity."⁹¹

Perhaps the most interesting insight to Dickinson's political state of mind at this time came from John Adams. In a restrained letter to James Warren, Adams proudly recorded that Dickinson had come around to the sensible (Adams) viewpoint, and was now "confessing himself, now for instituting governments, forming a Continental constitution, making alliances with foreigners, opening Ports and all that."⁹² But Dickinson's so-called political conversion was not so complete as Adams hoped; the Pennsylvania Assembly was unwilling to sanction separation from a mother country with which it was now at war, and the Pennsylvania delegates to the Congress labored under instructions to that effect. When Richard Henry Lee's resolutions calling for independence were debated in the Congress, the Pennsylvanians,

ed. by Frederick W. Ricord and William Nelson (Newark, N.J., 1886), X, 691. Dickinson represented the Congress in urging that New Jersey not undertake fresh petitions of its own to the King; his address was a forceful pep talk, and referred to French jealousy of England along with the comforting hope that "France will not sit still and suffer Britain to conquer." Dickinson did not obviously add his fear that this could lead to French rather than English tyranny in America.

⁹¹ Dickinson, *Remarks on a Late Pamphlet Entitled Plain Truth* (Philadelphia, 1776), p. 26.

⁹² John Adams to James Warren, May 20, 1776, *Warren-Adams Letters*, I, 251.

led by Dickinson, admitted their support for the principle involved—they “saw the impossibility that we should ever again be united with Great Britain”—yet they also opposed a formal decision on independence at this particular time.⁹³

Dickinson doubted if colonial unity—so essential to the struggle with England—could be maintained if a hurried declaration of independence was enacted: the middle colonies “were not yet ripe for bidding adieu to British connection.” He was confident that “they were fast ripening,” and that a little patience was all that was needed. The price of haste might be disunion, and the secession of any colonies from the main body could be fatal.⁹⁴ John Adams, joining in the debate, astutely noted that no opponent of Lee’s resolutions really argued against either the policy or the right of separation from England, “nor had supposed it possible we should ever renew our connection.” The real issue in the debates over independence was indeed one of timing. As Adams again noted, reluctant revolutionaries like Dickinson “had only opposed its being now declared.” For Adams the question was simply “whether we should declare a fact which already exists.”⁹⁵ For Dickinson, on the other hand, the decision hinged more upon the adequacy of preparations and the degree of colonial unity.

According to Jefferson’s notes on this discussion, Dickinson’s contentions had substance: it appeared that New York, New Jersey, Pennsylvania, Delaware, Maryland, and South Carolina “were not yet matured for falling from the parent stem, but that they were fast advancing to that state, [so] it was thought most prudent to wait a while for them.”⁹⁶ The Congress duly delayed further serious discussion until July 1, when the Lee

⁹³ June 8, 1776, Jefferson’s Notes of Proceedings in the Continental Congress, *Jefferson Papers*, ed., Boyd, I, 309.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, I, 310.

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, I, 311.

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, I, 313.

resolutions passed with only Pennsylvania and South Carolina in opposition (Delaware was divided). Internal Pennsylvania politics intruded upon the national picture, since the Assembly declined to change its attitude on independence, and was rewarded by popular repudiation.⁹⁷ Dickinson's position was delicate indeed. As a delegate of the Assembly his instructions to oppose separation remained. The uncertainties of the Pennsylvania condition seemed to Dickinson added cause for caution and further evidence of the need for improved colonial preparedness.

Thus Dickinson made his final effort against a declaration of independence *at this particular time*. His speech was given with the full knowledge of probable political consequences: he knew he risked his popularity and reputation, but would rather risk both "than Speak, or Vote contrary to the dictates of . . . Judgement and conscience."⁹⁸ He did not question independence as a matter of policy; but he continued to question the timing of such a declaration: all the speakers before the Congress, he noted, "agree that the utmost prudence is required in forming our decision, but immediately disagree in their notion of that prudence." Dickinson could not see any worth while effects deriving from an immediate rupture with England: the people were already aroused against England, and potential allies would surely be more impressed with deeds than mere words. A firm foreign alliance was vital as a first step towards independence, and the timing of an announcement of independence should be established with America's allies. Furthermore there should be greater progress in domestic arrangements, with the establishment of state governments and closer inter-colonial union: "not only treaties with foreign powers but among ourselves should precede this declaration."

⁹⁷ For a brief summary of conditions, see Jensen, *Articles of Confederation*, pp. 97-101.

⁹⁸ Commonplace Book, Benjamin Rush, pp. 80-81, Rush MSS., Lib. Co.

THE HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE OF JOHN DICKINSON

There could be little doubt of Dickinson's innate caution, after this speech; he wanted as many escape routes left open to America as possible: he particularly distrusted the French—who were after all traditional enemies to British colonists—and he feared being thrown upon their diplomatic mercy. It was still possible, Dickinson thought, for a military victory over English forces which would persuade the King to meet all American claims on a more generous scale than the French might contemplate. Americans were presently "in so wretched a state of preparation" that Dickinson felt they needed every possible diplomatic weapon: an announcement of independence without conclusive foreign commitments made for unnecessary risks.⁹⁹

Dickinson's protest was, in John Adams' view, "an idle mispence of time."¹⁰⁰ To cousin Sam Adams, it was another example of Dickinson's recent folly deriving from an obsession with the need for an accommodation with England.¹⁰¹ But when the formal vote for independence was taken on July 2, Dickinson abstained from voting and contributed to creating a majority within the Pennsylvania delegation in favor of independence; this permitted Congressional unanimity for independence—save for the uninstructed New Yorkers.¹⁰² Dickinson thus avoided compromising his own convictions and obstructing the majority will of his colleagues; but he refused to sign the Declaration and paid the immediate penalty of removal from the Congress as a Pennsylvania delegate.¹⁰³

⁹⁹ John Dickinson's Speech against Independence, July 1, 1776, *English Historical Documents IX*, ed. by Merrill Jensen (New York, 1955), pp. 873-77.

¹⁰⁰ John Adams to Samuel Chase, July 1, 1776, *Works of John Adams*, ed. Adams, IX, 415.

¹⁰¹ Samuel Adams to James Warren, December 12, 1776, *Warren-Adams Letters*, I, 280. In September 1777, Dickinson was still "the late Patriot."—*ib.* I, 370.

¹⁰² Alden, *American Revolution*, pp. 80-82.

¹⁰³ Stillé, *Dickinson*, p. 206.

His spirit was deeply wounded by the widespread criticism of his political conduct, but his convictions remained unshaken: "what can be more evident," asked Dickinson, "that than I have acted on Principle?" He still hoped his countrymen "should acknowledge the Rectitude" of his behavior,¹⁰⁴ and seven years later tried to help his colleagues toward this goal by publishing a "Vindication" of his revolutionary career. Here he again made clear his deep concern over the timing of independence. Just as he had become a revolutionary from a knowledge of the history of the rights of Englishmen in America, so history had given him pause on the best way to sustain such rights: he had not been able to find in history any instance

of a people, without a battle fought or an ally gained, abrogating forever their connection with a great, rich, warlike, commercial empire, whose wealth or connections had always procured allies when wanted, and bringing the matter to a prosperous conclusion.

He pointed out that the Declaration of Independence had not in fact brought an ally to the American side: the French alliance came only after the victory at Saratoga. To break with England, concluded Dickinson, "before we had compacted with another, was to make experiments on the lives and liberties of my countrymen, which I would sooner die than agree to make." The only explanation Dickinson could offer for American success without his precautions was the unexampled wisdom and generosity of the French.¹⁰⁵ History had not helped him here; he had not found a precedent for such nobility of behavior.

But history did Dickinson another disservice. In a letter to his friend Benjamin Rush two decades after independence, Dickinson expressed the hope that "I shall be considered a Man that with all his Frailties, was . . . an ardent Lover of Liberty, and a

¹⁰⁴ Dickinson's *Vindication*, Stillé, *Dickinson*, p. 369.

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 370-71.

disinterested friend to his Country." He liked to think of himself as "a constant Watchman for the public Interest, upon all great Emergencies."¹⁰⁶ Perhaps it is as well that Dickinson could judge himself in this manner, since historians rarely have: they, like John Adams, have inclined to the view that Dickinson's friendship for his country was perhaps too disinterested. Caution has been too often mistaken for fear; conservatism in political method has too often been mistaken for conservatism in political belief; and John Dickinson has too often been regarded as a man who mistook prudence for patriotism.

It is indeed rather ironic that so much misinterpretation of John Dickinson should derive from the well-publicized opinions of John Adams. At least one other revolutionary colleague better discerned Dickinson's persistent patriotic purpose: David Ramsay readily conceded Dickinson's friendship to both England and America, and recorded Dickinson's devotion "to a reconciliation on constitutional principles." But Ramsay also noted that when Dickinson became convinced of British repudiation of such constitutional principles, he was then fully prepared to harvest the revolutionary seeds he had earlier sown. "Nothing," observed Ramsay, "contributes more to the success of revolutions, than moderation."¹⁰⁷ If this is true, then Dickinson's political prudence made him one of the most useful of revolutionary architects and one of the most deadly enemies encountered by George III.

¹⁰⁶ Dickinson to Benjamin Rush, April 27, 1797, Dickinson MSS, Historical Society of Delaware.

¹⁰⁷ David Ramsay, *History of the American Revolution* (Lexington, Ky., 1815), I, 259, 262.

“A

CERTAIN GREAT FORTUNE
and PIDDLING GENIUS”

JOHN H. POWELL

February 19, 1960

John H. Powell, Ph.D.

Dr. Powell has long held a position of authority on the life and times of John Dickinson. His biography of the son of Benjamin Rush, RICHARD RUSH, REPUBLICAN DIPLOMAT, appeared in 1942. He is an authority also on medical history, and author of the best-selling BRING OUT YOUR DEAD!, 1949, an account of the great yellow fever epidemic of 1793. His BOOKS OF A NEW NATION, written as A. S. W. Rosenbach Fellow in Bibliography, 1956, recounts the history of our government publications, 1774-1814. To their sound scholarship is added the charm and high literary quality of his writings and lectures. His earlier Spahr Lecture, the second in the series, also with Dickinson as its subject is still fresh in the memory of those who were present, though it was delivered extemporaneously and never published.

“A

CERTAIN GREAT FORTUNE *and* PIDDLING GENIUS”

PHILADELPHIA'S summer heat poured through the windows, horse smells and heat smells hung hot in the air. Monday afternoon: a July afternoon, still and close, cruel in the toll it took of tempers and energies. John Adams sat at his desk in the Congress Chamber, the big high room in the State House. The sun reflected from the treeless graveled yard picked out the patterned ceiling, poured over the portrait of the king above the mantel.

Adams began to write letters. All around him, Congressmen bustled despite the heat. Speaker followed speaker, delegates clamored for recognition. The gentleman from Massachusetts no longer bothered to listen. He scratched away with his pen. It was a tedious debate, over “a Continental Treasury . . . a Paymaster . . . and a Committee of Correspondence or Safety, or Accounts, or something, I know not what, that has confounded Us all Day . . .” Adams was testy, irritated, annoyed. As he wrote, his choler rose. For months, he had fought for a simple, straightforward program, stated exactly what ought to be done, plainly, clearly. There could be no doubt of it, at least no doubt in Adams' mind. John Adams' mind was a firm, orderly, neatly arranged instrument. He reached conclusions with anguish and doubt, but once

he reached them his doubt was gone, and he anguished only that others would not agree, would not see the exact truth as he exactly saw it.

New England men did; and Southerners were generally "sound in their principles," which was to say, they generally agreed with Adams. Not that Southerners were reliable; they weren't. They were likely to be shifty, and easy-going, and to boggle over matters such as slaves and tobacco which no New Englander really had to think twice about: let the slaves be free, turn the tobacco fields to wheat. But Southerners were ready men. They agreed on strong measures.

The trouble was, these mid-colony people. New York, New Jersey, Pennsylvania, Maryland, Delaware—here was the very heart of the American seaboard, half the people of British America. They had seen all that Massachusetts had suffered; they had suffered themselves. But the middle-colony men held back, delayed, stood cautious in the moment for action, delayed even though Bunker Hill and the bloody battle were a month old in history. Adams had talked, debated, cajoled, persuaded; he had been virtuous and patient—at least *he* thought he was patient—but still the mid-colony men refused to join him on one great issue. On that, they paltered and trimmed and palavered—all because one man, one famous, cautious man, one man of wealth and power and great reputation, would not accept the facts, and the truth, and the rightness of John Adams' proposals.

As he wrote at his desk, Adams' patience ran out, his self-possession disappeared. He suddenly added a postscript to his wife: "I wish I had given you a complete history, from the beginning to the end of the journey, of the behaviour of my compatriots. No mortal tale can equal it. I will tell you in future, but you shall keep it secret. The fidgets, the whims, the caprice, the vanity, the superstition, the inability of some of us is enough to —" He could not finish. He drew a long eloquent line, and closed his page.

"A CERTAIN GREAT FORTUNE AND PIDDLING GENIUS"

He took another sheet, began a letter to his friend James Warren. "Philadelphia, July 24, 1775," he wrote. "Dear Sir, In Confidence. I am determined to write freely to you this time. A certain great Fortune and piddling Genius, whose Fame has been trumpeted so loudly, has given a silly Cast to our whole Doings. We are between Hawk and Buzzard . . ." His pen raced, he poured out his frustration, and his anger:

We ought to have had in our Hands a month ago the whole Legislative, executive, and judicial of the whole Continent, and have completely modeled a Constitution; to have raised a naval Power, and opened all our Ports wide; to have arrested every Friend to Government on the Continent and held them as Hostages for the poor Victims in Boston, and then opened the Door as wide as possible for the Peace and Reconciliation. After this they might have petitioned, and negotiated, and addressed etc. if they would. Is all this extravagant? Is it wild? Is it not the soundest Policy?

He folded his sheets, addressed them; and he omitted to add his Congressman's frank, because for these particular charges of explosive matter he had a personal messenger. Benjamin Hichborn the courier was riding back to Boston. Adams gave young Hichborn his very personal letters, to be delivered by hand to Mrs. Adams and to Mr. Warren.

Now John Adams had no idea, certainly, his letters would be seen by anyone except his wife, his friend James Warren, and perhaps those intimate companions who made up the Adams circle. He could not have anticipated what happened. As Benjamin Hichborn crossed the Hudson river, boats from a British man-of-war halted his ferry, British officers took the young courier prisoner; of course they searched his saddlebags, of course they found Adams' personal letters, dispatched them at once to General Gage, and of course that busy gentleman was delighted with the find and all it meant. To him, it meant serious divisions among the rebel leaders.

Sir Thomas Gage caused the letters to be published in

Draper's *Massachusetts Gazette*, on August 17 published in their full crackle of angry indiscretion, for the world to read. Most regrettable of all, for John Dickinson to read. "*A certain great Fortune and piddling Genius . . .*"

Apart from the issues, apart from all the disagreements, the language was so surprising, so petulant and petty, so unlike the manly, able Yankee. Once, Adams had liked Dickinson. When he first came to Philadelphia ten months before (September, '74) he met the famous Farmer with pleasure. "Mr. Dickinson is very modest, delicate, and timid," he wrote in his diary. After further meetings he added, "Mr. Dickinson is a very modest man, and very ingenious as well as agreeable; he has an excellent heart . . ." Dickinson stretched far above him in height; Adams had to stand back on his heels to look at him. He usually had to look up to people. "Mr. Dickinson has been subject to hectic complaints. He is a shadow; tall, but slender as a reed; pale as ashes; one would think at first sight that he could not live a month; yet, upon a more attentive inspection he looks as if the springs of life were strong enough to last many years . . ."

He was right, on that more attentive inspection. The springs of life in the shadow-thin, elegant Pennsylvania Farmer were taut and resilient, in spite of agues, fluxes, fevers, in spite of marsh and river miasma. The springs of dissent, too, and disagreement, and an assertive separateness of thought, the springs of originality. May, June, July this summer of '75, Adams had known the power of that inventive, complicated mind as Dickinson prevailed in the Congress again and again, brought the delegates every time to his view. Stocky round little Adams had frequently admired that analytical mind which refused to see things in simplicities, would never cease qualifying, deliberating, considering. The Yankee's impatience was a long season ripening. He was ready for action—had been, long months ago. So was Dickinson. But there were some actions Dickinson rejected outright, some points on which he held back, waited for the middle

land. Dickinson had reasons: cogent, impressive, plain, logical—convincing reasons, but not to New England men. They could not think seriously of his reasons as impediments. Dickinson had his own plan, his own way to make a nation. He was never less than polite, he was always good-tempered and pleasant. But he was as firm as the bricks of the State House itself, and when he and Adams clashed, the amiable Farmer yielded not an inch. Adams lost his fight.

He blamed it on Dickinson alone. Dr. Franklin he admired and respected, but he was disappointed in Franklin. The old man *seemed* resolute and bold, ready for the highest actions; but he would never move. "He has not assumed any thing, nor affected to take the lead; but has seemed to choose that the Congress should pursue their own principles and sentiments, and adopt their own plans." One young man in Pennsylvania, a certain James Wilson, he thoroughly approved. Wilson was Dickinson's law student, but, said Adams, his "fortitude, rectitude, and abilities too, greatly outshine his master's." (Looking backward on that observation today, past the scene of James Wilson dying a bankrupt and fugitive in a North Carolina swamp, ruined by wild avaricious speculations, we may well wonder at Adams preferring him in rectitude to John Dickinson, whose integrity no one else any time in his whole long life ever thought to question.) On that July day, Wilson was ineffectual; and as for the others, Adams noted regretfully that Biddle was ill, Mifflin gone off to war, John Morton sick in bed too. Only Dickinson and Willing of the Pennsylvania delegation were in their seats beside Franklin and Wilson. Adams looked at the two men. They both possessed immense wealth, it was said. Wealth was a sensitive point to John Adams. He had written his wife about Dickinson and Willing just yesterday (in a letter which happily Dickinson was never obliged to read in the public prints): "this province has suffered by the timidity of two overgrown fortunes. The dread of confiscation or caprice, I know not what, has influenced them

too much; yet they were for taking arms, and pretended to be very valiant."

Shocking stabbing words: *the dread of confiscation . . . pretended to be valiant!* Adams quickly added a line: "This letter must be secret, my dear; at least, communicated with great discretion."

In these July days of '75, particularly with this unfortunate incident of the intercepted letters, all possibility of fellowship between John Farmer and John Yankee, Pennsylvania's Dickinson and Massachusetts' Adams, came to an end. These two scholar-patriots, so equal to each other in intellect, so apt for yoking in harness, so full of the same passions and the same learning, so keen for news of virtue and news of nations past and present, could never meet again with ease. The words had been too pointed, too crude in their contempt: *A certain great Fortune and piddling Genius . . .*

Before the publication of the letters in Boston on August 17, Congress adjourned, on August 2. It reconvened again in Philadelphia on September 12. On September 16, walking up Chestnut street to the State House, Adams encountered Dickinson. "We met, and passed near enough to touch elbows. He passed without moving his hat or head or hand. I bowed, and pulled off my hat. He passed haughtily by. The cause of his offence is the letter, no doubt, which Gage has printed in Draper's paper. I shall, for the future, pass him in the same manner; but I was determined to make my bow, that I might know his temper. We are not to be upon speaking terms nor bowing terms for the time to come . . ."

But they were to be colleagues in Congress, daily in each other's presence. Long afterward, Adams wrote this: "We continued to debate, in Congress, upon all questions publicly, with all our usual candor and good humor . . ." It was a grudging tribute. Any man other than Adams might have said the same

thing another way, might have written: *Mr. Dickinson preserved his good humor even after my attack upon him was discovered and made public.* Not Adams: "... the friendship and acquaintance was lost forever."

During the next twelve months, Adams pounced gleefully on any news or opinion unfavorable to Dickinson. September 24 Dr. Benjamin Rush paid a Sunday call on the brace of Adamses. John Yankee wrote these words at the beginning of his famous friendship with the Philadelphia physician:

Dr. Rush came in. He is an elegant, ingenious body, a sprightly, pretty fellow . . . He complains of D[ickinson], says the Committee of Safety are not the representatives of the people, and therefore not their legislators; yet they have been making laws, a whole code, for a navy. This committee was chosen by the House, but half of them are not members, and therefore not the choice of the people. All this is just. He mentions many particular instances in which Dickinson has blundered; he thinks him warped by the Quaker interest and the church interest too; thinks his reputation past the meridian, and that avarice is growing on him. Says that Henry and Mifflin both complained to him very much about him. But Rush, I think, is too much of a talker to be a deep thinker; elegant, not great.

And throughout the rest of his life, Adams wrote freely of the intercepted letters, wrote of them so often one can imagine he felt an embarrassed guilt about the whole episode. Dickinson never mentioned it. He stood as tall, smiled as pleasantly; but not by one whit did he diminish his opposition to the hot violent men of New England. He made no personal allusions in debate, he wrote not a line of personal attack in private. "The cause of liberty"—he had published the words long before—"is a cause of too much dignity to be sullied by turbulence and tumult. It ought to be maintained in a manner suitable to her nature. Those who engage in it, should breathe a sedate, yet fervent spirit, animating them to actions of prudence, justice, modesty, bravery, humanity, and magnanimity." Dickinson kept his hurt to himself, and in silence.

Now Adams had the gift of words. So did John Dickinson. Both wrote classical prose, which we cherish today in the literature of liberty. But I ask you to notice a peculiar characteristic of the American Revolution, which is this: that in the critical twenty-two months from the meeting of the First Congress in September, 1774, to the adoption of the Resolution and Declaration of Independence in July, 1776, the debates and deliberations of the American colonials in rebellion took place in Philadelphia. That geographical fact meant, that Massachusetts men, New Englanders, Southerners were far from home. They wrote letters back to their families and friends—letters which constitute the largest part of the record of what transpired in debate and discussion. During this period, the Pennsylvania delegates—Dickinson, Franklin, Wilson, Mifflin, Morton, Willing, Allen, Biddle, Morris, Rhoads, Galloway, Humphrey, Ross—were living in their own homes, with their families about them, and their friends in easy reach of the conversational voice. They wrote no such letters as Adams or Jefferson wrote, they sat at home and talked. Conversations around the hearthstone, alas! leave the historian no records to study, and nothing to consider.

Moreover, it is a peculiarity of this period, that save for Rodney and Read of Delaware, and theirs were only minor roles, the whole leadership of the middle-colony men rested in these Pennsylvania delegates, who were actually Philadelphia residents—except for John Morton, who lived in Chester. New York delegates were not leading figures, even in their own colony; New Jersey and Maryland delegates, even those personally able and passionately partisan, wrote very little that helps us understand the mid-American point of view. Perhaps it was because their distance from home was a short one; they knew they would have a week-end visit, or a quick trip at any time. Long absences, of the far delegates, produced detailed letters; and the far delegates, New England and Southern, were united in one certain and particular mind. The Pennsylvania delegates,

who were at home among their intimates, were, in particular details, of another mind—but this great area of dissent, this mid-colony attitude of combining conciliation and negotiation with programs of resistance, did not express itself in anywhere near as full an epistolary record as the hot, violent men of New England left.

Suppose, when the First Continental Congress adjourned, it had by resolution called for the Second to meet in Charlestown, South Carolina, or in Boston, or Hartford in Connecticut. Then, perhaps, we would have explicit presentations of the middle-colony point of view. But Philadelphia once chosen proved convenient, so the men who thought otherwise were in the critical months domiciled in their own homes.

Another curiosity of the Revolutionary period is, of course, that Adams and Jefferson, in their old age, recollected in tranquility all the high emotions of the period, and wrote down their recollections, with uneven accuracy and puzzling (even though we may judge them innocent) mistakes in fact and inventions of conversations. History seemed to have been on their side. They lived so long that they saw their nation great and powerful and strong, and so it seemed that what they had advocated had been right, what those who opposed them had advocated at any moment had been wrong.

Historians have fashioned their accounts and opinions of the Revolution from the writings of these men—their letters in the years 1774-76, and their later recollections. It takes a certain amount of discrimination on the part of historians to realize the partisanship of youth is not always justified by the mere fact of survival to a great age; and to realize that there was a whole other point of view toward the issues of 1775 which the written sources do not adequately develop. Adams was so abundant in his letters; Dickinson so spare in his, and for the hardest problems in the hottest months of controversy Adams wrote most, Dickinson the least. Now what historian is going to fashion his history out of the records which are not there?

Even though the historian knows very well that Adams and Jefferson ended up political opponents, Jefferson and Dickinson ended up political friends. All of our writers have followed Adams' partisan letters in the months before Independence, and his *Autobiography* written so long afterwards, and have condemned Dickinson as over-conservative, slow to move, unaccountably and unwisely delaying. Our writers should have cast forward, to the scenes of the 1780's and '90's, during which Dickinson stood out among Americans as a personal epitome of humanitarian and egalitarian ideas (of which Dickinson College is only one of several impressive memorials), while Adams—he who accused the Farmer of avarice in '75 and the interest of great fortune—became in the '90's the political monolith of stability and property. When did wealth and high place have ever a more explicit political expression than both received from John Adams' Federal Party?

Now perhaps Adams was inconsistent. Was Dickinson also? Let us consider the issues of that July day in 1775, and see just what were the "whole doings" to which that "great Fortune and piddling Genius" had given "a silly cast," and how silly that cast was. I warn you, that a student with imagination and a carefree turn of mind, may for a breathless moment realize, that the truth of history can lie, not in what was, but in what might have been. He may see, that had the mid-colony men prevailed, had the thrust toward Independence been resisted until quarrels were settled, arms secured, foreign alliances made, an army firmly established, the public opinion of middle America led into consonance with the advanced views of New England and the South, then nationhood might have been achieved on a firmer basis, with a firmer league, at less than the appalling costs of a seven years' civil war, and unnamable human hardships.

In dealing with John Dickinson we are, after all, dealing with a man who did not oppose Independence, but thought it a

subsidiary issue, not the real question at stake. He did not oppose it on principle; he opposed it as policy, opposed it *when* it was done, as unwise and premature; and though Adams sneered at him as one who *pretended to be valiant*, Dickinson did actually go off to war once the resolution of independence passed over his opposition, and afterwards labored effectively in Congress and in the states to strengthen the governments, federal and state, which he had helped set up. He would not have written the draft of the Articles of Confederation, had he not approved of confederating; all he disapproved of plainly were foolhardy and ill-advised measures, and perhaps—*perhaps*, if we look carefully at the record both men had before them in 1776—we may come to believe that independence at the moment of its passage was actually a step somewhere near foolhardy and ill-advised.

Now John Dickinson was no piddling genius, and Adams knew it. He had won his great reputation honestly, by the productions of his own hand, and had succeeded in building in Pennsylvania a party that held the middle ground between Galloway and the loyalists on one side, and the excesses of radical leaders from the counties in the west, and among Philadelphia city's unenfranchised classes, on the other. For Dickinson, for all the leaders of the middle colonies, the relationship between the actions of the Continental Congress and the continued control of local politics by moderate, stable, experienced groups in each colony, was of the utmost importance. For the overthrow of one government should not, must not, result in the overthrow of all governments. Steps continental and local should be taken in such concord, that the erection of state governments and constitutions would be effected by the same party of men which had led the movement from the beginning. The alternative possibilities were frightening: no government at all, or a government set up by the inexperienced, unenfranchised, the unpropertied groups. Adams did not have this problem in the same dimensions in

Massachusetts as Chase and Paca had it in Maryland, Livingston in New Jersey, Dickinson in Pennsylvania. New York was a special case; there, dominant opinion was genuinely timid. There, the Provincial Congress was actually drafting a specific plan of conciliatory measures, far more hesitant than the Pennsylvania leaders would have accepted. New York was the middle colonies' problem. An American confederation without New York had no chance of success; but plainly the immediate enactment of Adams' violent program would lose New York to the cause of resistance. Dickinson, closer to James Duane of New York than Adams was during these summer months, perceived the necessity of going no faster than a pace which would take New York along.

Adams had certainly no quarrel with Dickinson by the end of the First Congress, October, 1774. During the subsequent winter of 1774-75 events moved so rapidly that the Continental Association—that rudimentary government which the First Congress had established—was already by May not only inadequate to the necessities of the spring, but actually a hindrance, for with the war in actual prosecution after Lexington and Concord the need for importations of supplies, banned by the Association, was imperative, and in July the Association had to be relaxed. At once on its first assembling in May, 1775, the Second Congress took the place of the Association, and going far beyond it began to do those things which a *government* does—run a military force, raise money, correspond with foreign governments, administer a post office, and do all manner of things which a people at war must have done for them by a government of some kind.

In these activities, no delegate was more vigorous, or more effective, than John Dickinson. He served on as many committees as Adams, he debated as often, he worked with constant attention to the demands of the summer.

And Dickinson, receiving personal letters from numerous

foreign correspondents, was continually alert to the possibilities of a change in British policy, to the friendship of British merchant classes, to the chance of an adjustment of the difficulties within the empire. Adams was already far advanced toward independence in his thinking. Dickinson was by no means startled by the word or thought of independence, but he was exploring for other solutions, anticipating every difficulty ahead. What after all was the purpose of the war? Was it not to defend the colonists against the military establishment barracked amongst them, against the exactions of the ministry and the penal measures that had been levied on Massachusetts and on Boston; ultimately to secure a restoration of the harmonious relations that had so long and so fruitfully existed under orderly constitutional government?

Independence was no new idea. It was as old certainly as 1765 in discussion. "The word REBELLION hath frozen them up Like Fish in a pond"—these words from Shakespeare Dickinson had placed on the title page of a pamphlet as long ago as the spring of 1766, his *Address to Barbados*. Nor was independence a particularly appealing idea, if it meant a nationhood without a commercial or a political identity, or a constitutional structure of liberty under law.

Now if we follow Adams' letters about Dickinson during the summer, and his recollections in his *Autobiography* written so much later, we find the picture he gives us of Dickinson the picture of a man of impossible obtuseness and political innocence. Such is not the truth about John Dickinson, and Adams, in his less partisan moods, certainly knew it. But Adams in his less partisan moods rarely wrote letters. Dickinson was partisan also; we must not think the Pennsylvania Farmer, long a sophisticate in political assemblies and legislatures, had no other weapons in debate than amiable courtliness. He made undoubted enemies. Eliphalet Dyer of Connecticut, exercised about Connecticut's Wyoming Valley land claims in Pennsylvania, at the

same time Adams was calling Dickinson a piddling genius declared that the Farmer "is lately most bitter against us and Indeavours to make every ill Impression upon the Congress against us but I may say he is not very highly Esteemed in Congress. He has taken a part very different from what I believe was expected from the Country in general or from his Constituents." He was, though Dyer did not know it, driven almost to the wall by the uncertainty of his success in the Pennsylvania Assembly and Convention developments at the moment, and would have been overthrown completely, had he lost in Congress to the New Englanders in the last of July. Adams cared as little about Pennsylvania's politics as he cared passionately about Massachusetts'. He was perfectly willing that the party equivalent to his own in Massachusetts should lose in Pennsylvania, if he could win the Congress.

Now a careful reading of Adams' writings during this summer of '75 will reveal his frequent use of such words as Peace, Negotiation, and Reconciliation. Similarly, a careful reading of Dickinson's writings provides us with plenty of strong phrases of resistance, unyielding opposition, and relentless defense against ministerial measures. What then was the real difference between the two leaders?

The difference, indeed, existed. But it was not the difference between strength and weakness, rashness and timidity, boldness and caution. The record is plain: there is no more talk of reconciliation in Dickinson's writings that summer, than in Adams' or Jefferson's. There is as much talk of sturdy resistance in his, as in theirs. But Dickinson had the delicate, exigent problem of a massive and articulate urban public opinion in Philadelphia to sway behind him, and he had a care for the New York situation. A just evaluation of the two men may well be, that the summer of 1775 was a period when Adams, profoundly affected by warfare and bloodshed in Boston, by the sufferings of Massachusetts—that "bitter cup" which the middle colonies had never tasted—

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came to Philadelphia predisposed against anyone not equally involved, anyone who would not address the issues of that urgent day in his own particular vocabulary, and share his own impulse toward the strongest measures; while Dickinson, affected deeply by the collapse of constitutional government and the threat of anarchy in the middle colonies, was prepared to resist any measures which would so conduct American resistance as to alienate the effective majority of expressive opinion in the trading centers on the Hudson and Delaware.

But what measures could these have been, on which John Yankee and John Farmer disagreed, and so sharply? The episode which sparked Adams to anger in his bitter intercepted letters was certainly not, as historians now invariably say it was, the Second Petition to the King. Even Adams did not say it was—until many, many years later, when he had forgotten the details. The angry "great Fortune and piddling Genius" letter was written on July 24. The Second Petition to the King had been adopted and signed by all the delegates fully twenty days earlier, July 5th, and by July 24th therefore had long since ceased to be an issue before Congress.

As near as can be told from the imperfect records of the journals and private letters that summer, the debate that actually caused Adams' excessive wrath to erupt was on the question of opening American ports to the trade of all nations. It was an important issue, a much more immediately significant one than the Petition to the King, and curiously, an issue on which Philadelphia merchants and Boston merchants might well have been in complete agreement. They were not.

The issue had been debated hotly for a whole month. It was the most controversial of all issues that summer, it involved the success or failure of merchant houses. Dickinson stoutly opposed the opening of the ports. He won, on July 22. "We have had in Contemplation a Resolution," John Adams wrote snappishly on July 23, "to invite all Nations to bring their Commodities to

market here, and like Fools have lost it for the present." Just how foolish the decision was, it is impossible to say; relaxing the Association was bound to help established merchant houses; opening the ports would have been a boon to such New England merchants as had been accustomed to trading outside the British code of regulations, but would have hurt Philadelphia merchants in regular and legal trade by permitting numbers of speculators and ship captains to compete with them in an open market. Merchants had been hurt by the Association. Dickinson knew he could not win them, in New York and Philadelphia and Maryland, to the program of supporting armed resistance and seeking negotiation from a strong position, unless their economic well-being was consulted. Opening the ports would destroy them. Certainly Adams approached this debate in angry temper, and passionate despair; certainly Dickinson approached it with firmness.

Now note, please, that this was Adams' only defeat that whole summer, and it was not a defeat which went to the heart of the issues of resistance and redress, but in his letters and his later writings, he makes it seem a major disaster.

On the Second Petition to the King, the Olive Branch Petition, Adams had actually not felt nearly so strongly as our writers have represented. Of course, he could have marshalled good reasons for opposing this Olive Branch Petition: he could reasonably have urged that such an appeal by the Congress, at the very time the Delegates were seeking to animate the soldiers in the field, might be regarded as evidence of Congressional weakness and insincerity. How could men fight for a government which would urge them against an enemy with one voice, and with another at the same time petition the enemy to receive them back in amity? Adams *could* have said these things—but he did not. There is no *contemporary* record that he opposed the Petition at all.

Dickinson, of course, had equally good reasons for insisting

on the Petition for Redress of Grievances. He knew, that leading men of influence and probity in Pennsylvania and New York, men who had been taking over each government and must lead in the vacancy of public affairs which would follow the end of the Assemblies, would support the Congress in measures of resistance, only if they saw spread before them a desirable end, an end consistent with their beliefs, their convictions, and their determination to right the ills which were wrong. Both men, Adams and Dickinson alike, certainly wished to keep the door open for negotiation, and both wished certainly to prosecute armed resistance to the fullest limit of American strength. The Petition passed, and Adams, while he had no enthusiasm for it, was not by any evidence exercised against it as he signed his name—not so exercised as he became on the issue of opening the ports to a trade which he wanted but which Dickinson feared would leave the American merchants unprotected.

Yet in his *Autobiography*, many years later, Adams gave an utterly different account of the Olive Branch Petition, and his feeling about it. "This measure of imbecility," he called it. His narrative is strange; perhaps we should charitably attribute it to the fuzzy memory of an old man in retirement. But his own diary was before him, and his memory in other respects was excellent. Adams in his *Autobiography*, for reasons we shall probably never understand, launched into an attack, embittered, specific, and curious, on John Dickinson. He invented, he imagined, he created with a novelist's zeal, and what he created was a romance. He wrote, that Pennsylvania's leaders, on first seeing independence approaching, suddenly started back, and retreated—which was not true, as the progress of Dickinson and Thomson in Pennsylvania plainly showed. And then Adams described what he remembered as his effect on the delegates in Congress in '75: "In some of my public harangues, in which I had freely and explicitly laid open my thoughts," he said, "on

looking round the assembly I have seen horror, terror, and detestation, strongly marked on the countenances of some of the members, whose names I could readily recollect; but as some of them have been good citizens since, and others went over afterwards to the English, I think it unnecessary to record them here." Such a description of the faces of the hard-working patient men of the Second Congress may have appealed to Adams long years later as what he would like to have seen, but there is actually no possibility of finding in the records of that body, either a debate, or any occasion for a debate, at which the well-known views of the busy and vocal Yankee could have occasioned in any delegate either horror or terror, or detestation; nor were the fifty-some men then daily in Congress in the habit of bothering themselves with such melodramatic registration of the manly and unmanly emotions. It was ridiculous of Adams to say so. Just as ridiculous was his indication that no one who disagreed with him could have been a good citizen, but that subsequent good citizenship in later life excused such a contrary person from his earlier behaviour.

His next sentence is even more surprising, and by no manner of explanation accountable. "There is one gentleman, however," he wrote, "whom I must mention, in self defence: I mean John Dickinson, then of Philadelphia, now of Delaware." Now Dickinson certainly had never attacked Adams; on the contrary, it was Adams who had attacked Dickinson, and why in self-defense it was necessary for him to single out Dickinson among all those others whose names "he could readily recollect" but did not, is a question which can be answered only by reference to the undoubtedly bitter memories Adams carried with him always of the summer of '75.

He then proceeded to aver that Dickinson at first had joined with him in believing the balance of opinion in the Congress lay with the delegates of South Carolina, who were thereupon wooed by Adams. He intimated that Dickinson wooed them too; but,

he stated, and he said Charles Thomson told him it was so, Dickinson's wife and mother were so intimidated by the Quakers, that they continually importuned Dickinson and distressed him with their remonstrances. In a peculiarly ugly sentence, ugly even for Adams' unaccountable piece of vitriol in his *Autobiography*, he described the two Dickinson ladies as bewailing the fate of themselves and their families if Dickinson persisted in his revolutionary measures. Adams wrote:

His mother said to him, "Johnny, you will be hanged; your estate will be forfeited and confiscated; you will leave your excellent wife a widow, and your charming children orphans, beggars, and infamous." From my soul I pitied Mr. Dickinson. I made his case my own. If my mother and my wife had expressed such sentiments to me, I was certain that if they did not wholly unman me and make me an apostate, they would make me the most miserable man alive . . . I was happy . . . I always enjoyed perfect peace at home.

Now only the slightest acquaintance with the characters of Mary Cadwalader, John Dickinson's mother, and Mary Norris Dickinson his wife, is necessary to convince one that this picture Adams paints is a ludicrous one. John Adams was recollecting gossip, or else he was inventing. Gossip was unworthy of him.

And then he proceeded to unite, in his agile, inventive recollection, the Quakers (with whom Dickinson was not in fellowship at this period of his life) and the new South Carolina delegates, as a party behind Dickinson—a party which, he declared, was engaged in villifying him (Adams) and discrediting him to Congress. Solemnly, he wrote: "The party made me as unpopular as they could, among all their connections, but I regarded none of those things. I knew and lamented that many of these gentlemen, of great property, high in office and of good accomplishments, were laying the foundation, not of any injury to me, but of their own ruin; and it was not in my power to prevent it."

The whole passage is regrettable. John Adams was rarely in the character of a self-righteous, condescending prig, and rarely fabricated legends. Nor was he actually defending himself against

any attack, by anybody. He was simply attacking Dickinson.

He proceeded to give a highly imaginary version of the introduction of the Second Petition to the King, how Dickinson procured it, arranged to have long speeches given in its support, how Adams spoke opposing it, and was followed by John Sullivan of New Hampshire in opposition also.

Now Adams described Sullivan—it was the only time John Sullivan was ever described so—as reasonable, witty, and fluent. "I was much delighted, and Mr. Dickinson, very much terrified at what he said, began to tremble for his cause. At this moment I was called out to the State House yard, very much to my regret, to some one who had business with me. Mr. Dickinson observed me, and darted out after me. He broke out upon me in a most abrupt and extraordinary manner; in as violent a passion as he was capable of feeling, and with an air, countenance, and gestures, as rough and haughty as if I had been a school-boy and he the master. He vociferated, 'What is the reason, Mr. Adams, that you New-Englandmen oppose our measures of reconciliation? There now is Sullivan, in a long harangue, following you in a determined opposition to our petition to the King. Look ye! If you don't concur with us in our pacific system, I and a number of us will break off from you in New England, and we will carry on the opposition by ourselves in our own way.' I own I was shocked with this magisterial salutation. I knew of no pretensions Mr. Dickinson had to dictate to me, more than I had to catechize him. I was, however, as it happened, at that moment, in a very happy temper, and I answered him very coolly. 'Mr. Dickinson, there are many things that I can very cheerfully sacrifice to harmony, and even to unanimity; but I am not to be threatened into an express adoption or approbation of measures which my judgment reprobates. Congress must judge, and if they pronounce against me, I must submit, as, if they determine against you, you ought to acquiesce.' These were the last words which ever passed between Mr. Dickinson and me in private . . ."

Such is Adams' narrative of the events of July 5 in his *Autobiography*. Admittedly a reconstruction from memory long after the event, it is, careful historians have sometimes acknowledged, not to be taken too seriously. Yet they have taken it seriously, quoted it, adopted its tone and general spirit. And therefore, I have to urge you to realize that his narrative cannot be accepted in any of its terms, as true in any of its aspects. "The more I reflected on Mr. Dickinson's rude lecture in the State House Yard, the more I was vexed with it," Adams wrote late in life; "and the determination of Congress in favor of the petition did not allay the irritation."

And then, he affirms, he wrote the letters which Benjamin Hichborn carried. "Irritated with the impoliteness of Mr. Dickinson, and mortified with his success in Congress," he scratched off in haste his "great Fortune and piddling Genius" words.

Now let us look at the record. That angry conversation in the Yard had to occur before July 5th, when the Petition was adopted. If we believe Adams, we must believe he sustained his irritation during daily debates on other subjects, and daily intercourse with Dickinson, for twenty days—from July 5 to July 24. It is an impossible assumption. And I suggest three other considerations which vitiate his narrative: first, Adams wrote as if he had suffered defeat over the issue of the Second Petition, whereas as a matter of fact, he did not. The Petition to the King did actually carry, and actually, Adams was not distressed that it did. It seems hard to believe he, or Sullivan, would have been opposing the Petition after it was written and reported from committee; at most they would have been debating a detail, which would scarcely have caused Dickinson to tremble in terror. Second, many parts of his narrative are uncharacteristic: Sullivan's wit as a speaker, which I regret to say (about so estimable a personage as General Sullivan) was unfortunately not one of his admittedly abundant gifts; Dickinson's peremptory manner, which is possible, though certainly not familiar in the contemporary portraits

drawn of the Pennsylvania Farmer—Dickinson's "violent passion," rough, haughty speech and gestures, are no more believable than his trembling in terror for his cause, for Dickinson certainly knew before the debate began how many of the twelve Congressional votes he had already lined up behind the Petition. Third, I propose, that while it is altogether possible some conversation, of some kind of adversary content, did actually take place between the two men, in the State House Yard, regarding the Petition, I cannot believe it was the conversation Adams records.

I cannot believe it, because this is what Adams wrote, to his most intimate male correspondent, on July 6, 1775, the day following the adoption of the Petition to the King, under the heading "SECRET AND CONFIDENTIAL, AS THE SAYING IS." You will notice, if you attend to it carefully, that he speaks regretfully, but not in anger, of the ideas of the middle-colony men; and ruefully but in *favor* of the Olive Branch Petition:

Secret and Confidential, as the Saying is.

The Congress is not yet so much alarmed as it ought to be. There are still hopes, that Ministry and Parliament, will immediately recede as soon as they hear of the Battle of Lexington, the Spirit of New York and Phyladelphia, the Permanency of the Union of the Colonies etc.: I think they are much deceived and that we shall have nothing but Deceit and Hostility, Fire, Famine, Pestilence and Sword from Administration and Parliament. Yet the Colonies like all Bodies of Men must and will have their Way and their Humour, and even their Whims.

These opinions of Some Colonies which are founded I think in their Wishes and passions, their Hopes and Fears, rather than in Reason and Evidence will give a whimsical Cast to the Proceedings of this Congress. You will see a strange oscillation between love and hatred, between War and Peace—Preparations for War and Negotiations for Peace. We must have a Petition to the King and a delicate Proposal of Negotiation, etc. This Negotiation I dread like Death: But it must be proposed. We cant avoid it. Discord and total Disunion would be the certain Effect of a resolute Refusal to petition and negotiate. My Hopes are

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that Ministry will be afraid of Negociation as well as We and therefore refuse it. If they agree to it, We shall have Occasion for all our Wit Vigilance and Virtue to avoid being deceived, wheedled threatened or bribed out of our Freedom. If we Strenuously insist upon our Liberties, as I hope and am pretty sure We shall however, a Negotiation, if agreed to, will terminate Nothing, it will effect nothing. We may possibly gain Time and Power and Arms.

You will see an Address to the People of G. Britain, another to those of Ireland, and another to Jamaica.

You will also see a Spirited Manifesto. We ought immediately to dissolve all Ministerial Tyrannies, and Custom houses, set up Governments of our own, like that of Connecticutt in all the Colonies, confederate together like an indissoluble Band for mutual defence, and open our Ports to all Nations immediately. This is the system that your Friend has arrived at promoting from first to last: But the Colonies are not yet ripe for it—a Bill of Attainder, etc., may soon ripen them.

This was Adams' "secret and confidential" opinion, at the time of its adoption, of that often maligned, scorned, scoffed-at Olive Branch Petition, which both Jefferson and Adams in their old age declared to be a testimony of Dickinson's conservatism and timidity. Now I cannot imagine that Dickinson, whose correspondence was extensive and whose opportunities for knowing the opinions of government and anti-ministerial men in Parliament were more abundant than most Americans, can have had any illusions about the possibilities of restoration, negotiation, and harmony. I cannot think he was, at the age of 43, after twelve years' vigorous and effective public life, more naive than the younger statesman John Adams from Massachusetts, at 39, or the much younger new delegate from Virginia, Thomas Jefferson, at 32. Dickinson was worldly, realistic, well-informed, and used to public affairs. He did things on purpose.

He had written the Petition to the King. He had composed it carefully, and while most people who talk or write of it fail to read it, it is actually true, that he used in this Olive Branch Petition stronger language, more precise terms of attack on the

cabinet ministers, than had hitherto been employed in Congressional papers. He spoke plainly to the king of his cabinet ministers as "those artful and cruel enemies, who abuse your royal confidence and authority, for the purpose of effecting our destruction." He did not hesitate to address the sovereign in words accusing and plain:

We shall decline the ungrateful task of describing the irksome variety of artifices, practised by many of your majesty's ministers, the delusive pretences, fruitless terrors, and unavailing severities that have from time to time been dealt out by them, in their attempts to execute this impolitic plan, or of tracing thro' a series of years past, the progress of the unhappy differences between *Great Britain* and these colonies, that have flowed from this fatal source.

That "candid mind" of whom the eighteenth-century writer was so fond of talking might well consider, that if this was an Olive Branch, it sprouted several thorns.

Of course, as every one on both sides of the Atlantic fully knew, the Petition to the King, though addressed to the King in form, was a propaganda address to British and American people. Its fate as a legal process of approach to the throne was of much less significance than its success in influencing public opinion. And far from being a weak document of mild councils, it was—when lawyers and merchants and thoughtful men in New York, Albany, Trenton, Elizabeth Town, Philadelphia, New Castle, Baltimore and Annapolis perused it, or when Whigs in London still striving for reconciliation studied it, or when the brothers Howe preparing for their peace conference examined it—a vociferating protest, well calculated to assure the world of America's seriousness in resistance.

John Dickinson knew England, and English politics. He certainly knew, that a Petition presented in such language as this, could never be accepted by the ministry it attacked, and he knew surely that the king was not about to change his ministers. The remote possibility that Parliament would vote the cabinet out

did not, and he knew this too, depend on the American issue. His Petition was not addressed to these phantom possibilities. Rather, it was addressed to the mind of middle-America, in words designed to persuade the governing classes that their situation, dominated by the punitive measures of the present ministry, admitted of no other policy than the system articulated by Congress, of armed resistance coupled with specific peace proposals.

Nor did Dickinson ever regard his Olive Branch Petition as a weak or conciliatory measure. Such strong language was aggressive, threatening, forward, not pacific. He regarded the Petition as a constitutional measure, and a sound measure of political propaganda. He staked something on it, but not much—certainly not the passion and trembling apprehension Adams fancifully described. It was a part of a program, but by no means a whole program, to him. Actually, he regarded it almost precisely as did Adams. On the second day following its passage, he, too, wrote a letter—not to an intimate correspondent, but to a correspondent he had learned to handle with care, for the best effect of the letters he sent him. Arthur Lee was a somewhat unreliable man; Dickinson knew that. He was one of those strange people who could never seem to settle down. He earned a perfectly good medical degree, from Edinburgh, but he deserted medicine, went to the Inns of Court, studied law, became a London barrister. Now he was aiding and abetting his brother William, while that particular Lee of Virginia got himself elected first a sheriff of London, then an alderman. But Arthur Lee for all his restlessness was useful, and busy with the Whig interest in London. And to him, Dickinson wrote in terms so precisely like Adams' that we may well be surprised that the two men, who would be in the posture of embittered opponents on July 24, could be so exactly similar in views on July 7:

Dear Sir,

Before this comes to hand, you will have received, I presume, the Petition to the King. You will perhaps at first be surpriz'd,

that we make no *Claim*, and mention no *Right*. But I hope, [on] considering all Circumstances, you will be [of] opinion, that this Humility in an address [to] the Throne is at present proper.

Our Rights [have] been already stated—our Claims made—W[ar] is actually begun, and we are carrying it on Vigorously. This conduct and our other Publications will shew, [that our] spirits are not lowered. If Administration [be] desirous of stopping the Effusion of British [blood], the Opportunity is now offered to them [by an] unexceptionable Petition, praying for accommodation. If they reject this appl[ication] with Contempt, the more humble it is, [the more] such Treatment will confirm the Minds of [our] Countrymen, to endure all the Misfortunes [that] may attend the Contest.

It is always said, that Adams and Jefferson signed the Olive Branch Petition reluctantly. They said so themselves, many years later. And probably it is true, that they signed it with no expectation that the king would ever receive it, or treat it with anything other than the contempt with which he had treated the First Congress' petition. Plainly, Dickinson deceived himself with no more sanguine expectations than Adams and Jefferson. At the time of its passage, Adams described the Petition as *necessary*: "it must be proposed. We can't avoid it. Discord and total Disunion would be the certain effect of a resolute refusal to petition and negotiate." Dickinson described it as *advisable*: it offered the Whigs an occasion and an opportunity to propose negotiation, and if rejected, would show Americans the contempt in which they were held by the ministry.

So very much has been made, of Dickinson's Olive Branch Petition, and of his subsequent opposition a year later to the Lee Resolution of Independence when it was proposed, that from these two episodes in his busy political life, he has been made to serve our writers as the symbol of timidity and conservatism. This opinion is an unfortunate distortion of his principles and his views, and leads us into misunderstanding of the work of the Second Continental Congress. It comes, not from the sources of

'75, but from the much later memories, written down with inventions, assumptions, and attitudes as well as purposes quite otherwise than the compilation of a just and accurate narrative by Adams and Jefferson.

To those who have not studied the Congress' calendar day by day in 1775 it may come as something of a surprise to know that the "great Fortune and piddling Genius" letter had nothing to do with the Petition to the King, but rather was prompted by a sour disagreement on an issue of commercial importance, but one of no permanent interest in the political thinking and theory of the Revolution: opening the ports to free trade.

Adams and Dickinson both, throughout this summer's session, proposed a similar program: strengthened resistance on the one hand supported by propaganda addresses to Americans, British, and colonists in West India islands and Canada; and on the other hand steadily renewed proposals of negotiation and reconciliation. In pamphlet propaganda, no one in the Congress was so experienced a hand as Dickinson. From 1764, his great fame had rested in his eloquent and popular statements of the American cause. Jefferson's reputation was yet to come, in this important field of propaganda. Adams' reputation was a local New England fame, even after the *Novanglus* papers. But every American knew the writings of the Pennsylvania Farmer. And no one, in or out of Congress in June and July of '75, regarded him as a symbol of timidity, conservatism, or slowness.

What then exactly were the whole doings to which the great Fortune and piddling Genius gave what Adams described as a silly cast? The answer, I am sorry to say, is that no one now knows. No one knows, because there are no records of those long spirited debates on opening the ports. Clear it is, that the mid-colony men succeeded in defeating the measure on Saturday, the 22nd of July; that the New England men succeeded in having the question reopened for debate on July 31, only to lose it

again. This may have been the issue at stake on Monday the 24th when Adams wrote. It is also possible that on the 22nd or 24th the difficult suppressed but smouldering fires of the Connecticut claims in Wyoming were brought forth. At least, the Connecticut delegates were high against the Pennsylvanians by the date of adjournment, August 2. Wyoming was another of the bones of angry contention between the middle colonies and New England.

Whatever the whole doings were, they were not doings that involved Adams and Dickinson in disagreement over the large major policies Congress should pursue in dealing with General Gage, and with Great Britain. They were not doings that went to the roots of principle or the canons of constitutional theory. Yet Adams' harsh, picturesque words have been enlarged into an image of political conflict in '75, an image unfortunately entirely false, even though it is the image projected in the late writings of the longest-lived patriots.

Of all the transactions of the Second Continental Congress, none was more important, nor more attended to, than that document, which Adams referred to in his "Secret and Confidential" letter of July 6, as "a Spirited Manifesto." On that very day, the next day after the Petition to the King was adopted, Congress heard, approved, adopted, and ordered printed *A Declaration of the Causes and Necessity of Taking Up Arms*. This Declaration of July 6, 1775, containing so much of eloquence and feeling in it, so well calculated to dignify, to the soldier in his trench and the militiaman on his training ground the cause for which he was in arms, containing too so many of the phrases and ideas used a year later by Jefferson in his Declaration of Independence—this Declaration, which remains for us today one of the three major statements of the American purpose and collective will at the birth-time of our nation, in company with the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution of 1787, was written, for

the most part, by John Dickinson. The very man who wrote the Olive Branch Petition, wrote the Spirited Manifesto; both are bold, aggressive, confident statements.

Mr. Julian Boyd has studied the drafts of the *Declaration of the Causes and Necessity of Taking Up Arms*. With a finality that admits of no doubt, he has proved two significant things about it: he has separated carefully out from the various drafts, exactly what Dickinson, exactly what Jefferson wrote; and he has destroyed the myth that Dickinson softened, or weakened the Jefferson draft. Quite to the contrary, Dickinson strengthened it. Always, historians have said the opposite. They said so, because Jefferson in *his* autobiography, written sometime after the year 1821, said so. Jefferson wrote,

I prepared a Draught of the Declaration committed to us. It was too strong for Mr. Dickinson. He still retained the hope of reconciliation with the mother country, and was unwilling it should be lessened by offensive statements. He was so honest a man, and so able a one that he was greatly indulged even by those who could not feel his scruples. We therefore requested him to take the paper and put it into a form he could approve. He did so, preparing an entire new statement, and preserving of the former one only the last 4 paragraphs and half of the preceding one. We approved and reported it to Congress who accepted it.

Now as Mr. Boyd has demonstrated, nearly every word of Jefferson's statement in his old age is entirely inaccurate. So far from softening Jefferson's passages, Dickinson at every point he made a change, or retained any of Jefferson's draft, stiffened the language, gave it a higher tone. Once again, Dickinson has been the victim of late-recorded opinions of those who were not friendly to him, and historians have accepted their unjustified portrayal of the Farmer as the symbol of timidity. A true and just picture would make him, in 1775, every bit as much a symbol of advanced and vigorous opposition as John Adams or Thomas Jefferson, though a person more careful that summer to test the constituent will. Where Jefferson's draft had admitted

the colonies previously might have acquiesced in Parliamentary power over them, Dickinson struck out the admission. Where Jefferson had spoken mildly of "new legislation," Dickinson used the phrase, "the pernicious Project." Dickinson added the phrase, "murderers of the colonists." He spoke of Lord North's proposal "to extort from us, at the point of the Bayonet, the unknown sums that should be sufficient to gratify, if possible to gratify, ministerial Rapacity." Where Jefferson had made a veiled threat of independence, Dickinson was blunt and breathlessly frank: "We have not raised Armies with ambitious Designs of separating from Great Britain, and of establishing Independent States." Jefferson had stepped off from the threat of secession: "That necessity must be hard indeed which may force upon us this desperate measure." Dickinson plunged into it with boldness: "Necessity has not YET driven us into that desperate measure."

In short, Dickinson, in the most important affirmative act of the Congress in 1775, added toughness and inflammatory language to a document which men whom historians generally say were advanced beyond him in their thinking, had originally couched in terms he knew, from a sensitive ear and long experience with his gift of the word, would be entirely inadequate to animate the amateur citizen-soldiers fighting and dying at Bunker Hill, during those days when the *Declaration* was first drafted.

History, in the long run, is what historians write. And what historians write becomes the traditions and folkways of a people. But sometimes one comes across, in the literature of history, errors and easy judgments, which make the past unreal, conceal the human aspects of the human story historians are called to tell. The real issue of the problem of 1775, is not whether we today think well or ill of John Dickinson as a statesman, as a person. Rather, the issue is understanding the subtle intensities of the independence movement, as a movement led by, inspired by, directed by, men in search of a political structure that would

fulfill them in their individual and collective impulses. Jefferson, Adams, and others too, writing in the lengthening shadows of their memories when they were full of years, give us a picture of unbelievable simplicities. If as historians we reduce the things men have thought and done and said and felt in the past to simplicities, then we have given ourselves a history in blacks and whites, a history in rights and wrongs, and we have left no room for the man reacting and thinking and contending, or for the better world which might have been. We have left room only for the misfortunes that were, and the triumphs history celebrates with little thought.

Dickinson's sturdy opposition to Independence, so brilliantly conducted and so comprehensively argued by him in the summer of 1776, will be understood as the reasonable view of a reasonable man, entirely consistent with his love of country and his dedication to the principles of a law-limited government which he had done so much to enunciate for his generation, only if such words as *timidity*, *conservatism*, *slowness*, *hesitation*, *avarice*, *dread*, and *caprice*, words used by Adams and Jefferson three, four, and five decades afterwards, are eliminated from our description of the policy and program urged by a man who was, after all, from the opening of the ministerial contest to the day of independence itself one of the most notable and universally respected of American advocates.

On the single question of opening the ports, Adams called him a great Fortune and piddling Genius, said he had given a silly cast to our whole doings. But Adams, and all Americans, received with justifiable thrills of emotion and pride the stirring words written by that same Fortune and Genius, in the *Declaration of Causes*, his "Spirited Manifesto."

The *Declaration*, overshadowed by its successor of the next year, has dropped out of memory now. But those words of John Dickinson rang like a bugle call when Washington ordered them

proclaimed in his camp above Boston, when soldiers heard them around drumheads in every colony during those days following Bunker Hill:

"... a Reverence for our great Creator, Principles of Humanity, and the Dictates of Common Sense, must convince all those who reflect upon the Subject, that Government was instituted to promote the Welfare of Mankind, and ought to be administered for the Attainment of that End.

"The Legislature of Great Britain, however, stimulated by an inordinate Passion for a Power not only unjustifiable, but which they know to be peculiarly reprobated by the very Constitution of that Kingdom, and desperate of Success in any Mode of Contest, where Regard should be had to Truth, Law, or Right, have at Length, deserting those, attempted to affect their cruel and impolitic Purpose of enslaving these Colonies by Violence, and have thereby rendered it necessary for us to close with their last Appeal from Reason to Arms. Yet however blinded that Assembly may be, by their intemperate Rage for unlimited Domination, so to Slight Justice and the Opinion of Mankind, we esteem ourselves bound by Obligations of Respect to the Rest of the World, to make known the Justice of our Cause . . .

"Our cause is just. Our union is perfect. Our internal Resources are great, and, if necessary, foreign Assistance is undoubtedly attainable . . . With hearts fortified with these animating Reflections, we most solemnly, before God and the World, declare, that, exerting the utmost Energy of those Powers, which our beneficent Creator hath graciously bestowed upon us, the Arms we have been compelled by our Enemies to assume, we will, in defiance of every Hazard, with unabating Firmness and Perseverance employ for the preservation of our Liberties; being with one Mind resolved to die Freemen rather than to live Slaves."

BENJAMIN RUSH
and the
AMERICAN REVOLUTION

GOTTFRIED DIETZE

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BENJAMIN RUSH *and the* AMERICAN REVOLUTION

I

HISTORY often renders unjust verdicts by narrowing the achievements of great men. Benjamin Rush is known as the father of American medicine; as a political philosopher, he is a forgotten man. Is it because he had the bad luck to live in a period which abounded in great political figures? Is it because his contributions do not seem to measure up to those of the Adamses, a Madison, a Hamilton? His political thought here considered ought to elevate him to front rank in his period.

Defining a political revolution as an act negative toward and illegal under the existing order, the American Revolution was a genuine political revolution. When Patrick Henry exclaimed "Caesar had his Brutus, Charles I his Cromwell and George III . . ." his countrymen shouted "Treason." The colonists were reluctant rebels, and the logic of Samuel Seabury was more convincing than the arguments of the revolutionaries who could not base their claim on positive law which was on the side of England. It was, further, a negative movement with regard to the existing political system; the colonists wanting to shake off the English order and to establish an American one in its stead.

Benjamin Rush first widened this narrow concept of the American Revolution. In 1786 he wrote Richard Price that "most of the *distresses* of our country . . . have arisen from the belief that the American Revolution is *over*. This is so far from being the case that we have only finished the first act of the great drama. We have changed our forms of government, but it remains yet to effect a revolution in our principles, opinions, and manners so as to accommodate them to the forms of government we have adopted."¹ A year later he elaborated his views in an address to the people of the United States. "There is nothing more common," he stated, "than to confound the terms of the American Revolution with those of the late American War. The American War is over: but this is far from being the case with the American Revolution. On the contrary, nothing but the first act of the great drama is closed. It remains yet to establish and perfect our new forms of government, after they are established and brought to perfection . . . THE REVOLUTION IS NOT OVER."² Rush saw the American Revolution not merely as a single event, but as a drama, consisting of several acts. In 1786 he viewed the Revolutionary War and the ensuing establishment of governments independent from the Crown as the first act of the Revolution and the preparation of the people to live "under the forms of government we have adopted" as a second act. A year later he revised this second act as one during which the perfection of these governments or the establishment of new, more perfect forms took place, and he now considered the preparation of the people to live under the improved governments as a third act. Frightened, like most of the property owners in this critical period of American history, by the alarming events occurring under the weak federal government and too democratic

¹ Letter of May 25, 1786, in Butterfield, ed., *Letters of Benjamin Rush* (1951), p. 388.

² Hezekiah Niles, *Principles and Acts of the Revolution*, Baltimore, 1822, p. 402.

state governments, Rush warned that "in our opposition to monarchy, we forgot that the temple of tyranny has two doors. We bolted one of them by proper restraints: but we left the other open, by neglecting to guard against the effects of our own ignorance and licentiousness."³ Just as the Americans could start a revolution against a monarchical tyranny from without, they could now take revolutionary steps against a tyranny threatening from within—the excessive democracy in the states, against which the federal government under the Articles was powerless. He urged this in as much as "the Confederation, together with most of our state constitutions, were formed under very unfavorable circumstances."⁴ Or, if changes in the state governments were not feasible, the Articles of Confederation might be reversed to create a stronger national government and thus prevent democracy in the states from becoming despotic. Rush's reasoning sounded convincing. This would not be a new revolution. It would be the second act of the American Revolution itself.

To sum up: For Rush the American Revolution consisted of three acts: The first two were concerned with the overthrow of existing orders, the third with the education of the people to live under the government thus established. Only the former constitute political revolution, hereafter called **POLITICAL AMERICAN REVOLUTION**, while the latter is wholly legal under and positive toward the existing order. While clearly recognizing a pattern of revolution on the American scene, Rush in no sense created a concept of permanent revolution.⁵ Permanence was found in the non-political aspects of the American Revolution alone, the purpose of which was "to prepare the principles, morals and manners of our citizens for these forms

³ *Ibid.*, p. 402.

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 402.

⁵ In later years Rush spoke of the "late" revolution just as in his address of 1787 he had spoken of "the late American War." See his letters to Elias Boudinot of July 9, 1788 and to John Adams of August 14, 1805. *Letters* (Butterfield, ed.), pp. 472, 902.

of government, after they are established and brought to perfection." This awareness of a revolution from the standpoint of education, as an aftermath of a political revolution, merits attention. Since that revolution means education under and for an order set up by a previous and concluded political revolution, it is not *revolutio contra constitutionem*, but *revolutio intra constitutionem*: it is evolution, hereafter called AMERICAN EVOLUTION. For Rush, the AMERICAN EVOLUTION had for its objective good citizenship. His ideal type of the American is a citizen who believes in the values of the POLITICAL AMERICAN REVOLUTION.

Rush's recognition of the pattern of revolution opened a wide field of opportunities. Not only did it justify a revision of the Articles of Confederation. It furthermore encouraged the delegates to the Federal Convention not to be too particular about the authorizations from their states and, if necessary, to overthrow the existing order in an extra-legal, revolutionary way. The concept of AMERICAN EVOLUTION, on the other hand, amounted to an enthronement of the Constitution: As long as the American people live under the fundamental law, they meet the requirements of citizenship. Abolition of this Constitution would mean the end of AMERICAN EVOLUTION.

It remains to be seen what this Constitution stands for. The answer is found by inquiring into the question: "In how far is the Constitution the result of the POLITICAL AMERICAN REVOLUTION?" In a political revolution, both the existing order and the revolutionary movement have an ideal and a material content. And whereas the ideal content of the existing order is materialized in its fundamental laws, the ideal content of the revolutionary movement is materialized in the attempt to overthrow the *status quo*. The successful revolution destroys the existing order by discontinuing its fundamental laws and by transmuting the ideal of the revolutionaries into new fundamental

law. Transferred into Rush's concept of the POLITICAL AMERICAN REVOLUTION, this means that the ideal of the revolutionary movement was materialized into fundamental law, the Constitution.

Rush's address to the people of the United States suggests that this ideal was anti-tyrannical, no matter whether, as in the first phase, the revolutionary movement was directed against the tyranny of the king or, as in the second phase, against the tyranny of democracy. For Rush, who "took an active part in the politics of the stirring period which led up to the Revolution," who "as a signer of the Declaration of Independence . . . had done much work in preparing the way for, and was even more radical than his friends in urging its adoption,"⁶ and who, after freedom had been won from England, urged his countrymen to adopt new forms of government in order to secure freedom from democratic tyranny, the revolutionary movement stood for the protection of vested rights. A signer of the Declaration which declared that all men are "endowed by their Creator with certain inalienable rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of happiness," Rush continued in his advocacy of those rights in the following years. In 1777 he wrote to Anthony Wayne that "a happy constitution is the most powerful inducement to press on a soldier to the toils and dangers of a campaign. He anticipates the pleasure with which he will forget them both in the perfect security he will enjoy hereafter for his property, liberty and life."⁷ In the same year he called a despotic government one which was not "affording security to property, liberty or life,"⁸ and in 1788 he expressed his

⁶ J. C. Wilson, *An Address, delivered at the unveiling of a monument erected by the American Medical Association to the memory of Benjamin Rush* in Washington, D.C., June 11, 1904, pp. 6, 17.

⁷ Letter of April 2, 1777, *Letters* (Butterfield, ed.), p. 137.

⁸ *Observations on the Government of Pennsylvania* (1777), in Runes, ed., *The Selected Writings of Benjamin Rush* (1947), p. 60.

confidence in the new Constitution: "To look up to a government that establishes justice, insures order, cherishes virtue, secures property and protects from every species of violence, affords a pleasure that can only be exceeded by looking up . . . to an overruling providence."⁹ The fact that Rush seldom used, as did most of his contemporaries, the sequence "life, liberty and property" and often puts "property" first, seems to indicate that from among vested rights, those of property were to him most important.

For Rush, the revolutionary movement stood, further, for a government by the people. Having endorsed the Declaration of Independence which said that "governments are instituted among men, deriving their powers from the consent of the governed," Rush pleaded for popular government up to 1787 when, in his address to the people of America he stressed that: "all power is derived from the people."¹⁰ However, he did not favor direct democracy.¹¹ Being of the opinion that "all governments are dangerous and tyrannical in proportion as they approach simplicity,"¹² Rush conceived of as much danger to vested rights from the simplicity of a monarchy as from that of a democracy. Although he was opposed to minority rule, which he called a "solecism in government,"¹³ Rush did not favor sheer majority rule either, complaining that "by the Constitution of Pennsylvania, the whole of our liberty and property . . . may be taken from us, by the hasty and passionate decision of a single assembly," continuing, "the liberty, the property and life of every individual in the State are laid prostrate . . . at the feet of the Assembly. This combination of powers in one body has at all ages been pronounced a tyranny. To live by one man's will became the cause

⁹ To Ramsay in March or April, 1788. *Letters* (Butterfield, ed.), p. 454.

¹⁰ Niles, *op. cit.*, pp. 402 ff.

¹¹ *Ibid.*

¹² *Observations on the Government of Pennsylvania* (1777), *op. cit.*, p. 60.

¹³ *Ibid.*, p. 74.

of all men's misery; but better, far better, would it be to live by the will of one man, than to live, or rather to die, by the will of a body of men."¹⁴ For Rush, the government the Revolution stood for was not monarchy, since under it the individual had no right to participate in government. Neither was it a popular government which through its simplicity tended to be despotic. It was a "compounded" popular government rather, for "all governments are safe and free in proportion as they are compounded."¹⁵

Since Rush considered government a means to an end,¹⁶ the ideal of the revolutionary movement was to him primarily the protection of vested rights and only secondarily popular government: participation in government only for the individual's protection, not for the mere pleasure of governing which might result in an encroachment upon vested rights. This amounts to a restriction of the majority, to its subordination under law: "It would have been a truth, if Mr. Locke had not said it, that where there is no law, there can be no liberty."¹⁷

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 68, 70. See also p. 57: "I shall now . . . say a few words upon particular parts of the Constitution. In the second section, 'the supreme legislature is a vested in a 'single House' . . .' By this section we find, that the supreme, absolute, and uncontrolled power of the State is . . . in the hands of *one body* of men. Had it been lodged in the hands of one man, it would have been less dangerous to the safety and liberties of the community. Absolute power should never be trusted to man . . . I should be afraid to commit my property, liberty and life to a body of angels for a whole year . . ." To Wayne he wrote on May 9, 1777: "A single legislature is big with tyranny. I had rather live under the government of one man than of 72." *Letters* (Butterfield ed.), p. 148.

¹⁵ *Observations on the Government of Pennsylvania* (1777), *op. cit.*, p. 60. Rush often used for "compounded," limited popular government the term "republican government."

¹⁶ He was a signer of the Declaration of Independence which said that governments are instituted among men to secure their rights. In *Of the Mode of Education in a Republic* (Essays, etc., 2d. ed., p. 8), he said that "liberty is the object to all republican government."

¹⁷ Letter to Ramsay of March or April, 1788, *Letters* (Butterfield ed.), p. 454.

This ideal form of government under law, providing for government by the people for the people, Rush called "Free Government." Under it, "the most inconsiderable portion of our liberty and property cannot be taken from us without the judgment of two or three courts,"¹⁸ it is superior to a rule of an interested and overbearing majority,¹⁹ then existing in his home state Pennsylvania, where "the whole of our liberty and property . . . may be taken from us, by the hasty and passionate decision of a single Assembly."²⁰ For Rush, Free Government was thus the ideal of the revolutionary movement. Consequently, the result of the POLITICAL AMERICAN REVOLUTION, the Constitution, embodied Free Government.²¹

II

Closely connected with Rush's advocacy of Free Government is his support of the Union. As early as 1776 he stated on the floor of the Continental Congress: "We are now a new nation. Our trade, language, customs, manners don't differ more than they do in Great Britain. The more a man aims at serving America, the more he serves his colony . . . We have been too free with the word independence; we are dependent on each other, not totally independent States . . . I would not have it understood that I am pleading the cause of Pennsylvania; when I entered that door, I considered myself a citizen of America."²² Made at the beginning of the War of Independence, this statement

¹⁸ *Observations on the Government of Pennsylvania*, *op. cit.*, p. 68.

¹⁹ This expression was used by Madison in Federalist No. X.

²⁰ *Observations on the Government of Pennsylvania*, *op. cit.*, p. 68.

²¹ Rush expressed his admiration for the Constitution in a letter to Ramsay of 1788: "To look up to a government that establishes justice, insures order, cherishes virtue, and protects from every species of violence, affords a pleasure that can only be exceeded by looking up . . . to an overruling providence. Such a pleasure I hope is before us and our posterity under the . . . new government." *Letters*, (Butterfield ed.), p. 454.

²² John Adams' *Notes of Debates* (Burnett, ed.), *Journals of the Continental Congress*, Vol. VI, p. 1081.

shows that Rush conceived of the Union as a means for the achievement of Free Government from monarchical tyranny in the first act of the POLITICAL AMERICAN REVOLUTION. And after one door to the temple of tyranny had been bolted through the defeat of the British, it remained to bolt that other door. Horrified about democratic despotism in the states,²³ Rush again saw in the Union the means for the preservation of Free Government. In his address to the people of the United States he described, after denouncing democratic tyranny as one evil of the Confederation, that other shortcoming of the Articles: "The people of America have mistaken the meaning of the word sovereignty: hence each state pretends to be *sovereign*. In Europe, it is applied only to those states which possess the power of making war and peace—of forming treaties, and the like. As this power belongs only to Congress, they are the only sovereign power in the United States. We commit similar mistakes in our ideas of the word independent. No individual state, as such, has any claim to independence. She is independent only in a union with her sister states in Congress."²⁴ For Rush, the Philadelphia Convention had not been called to form a more perfect Union only, but to create the Union in order to secure Free Government.

²³ "Is not history as full of the vices of the people, as it is of the crimes of kings?" Rush asked when the Constitution was before the ratifying conventions. "What is the present moral character of the citizens of the United States? I need not describe it. It proves too plainly that the people are as much disposed to vice as their rules; and that nothing but a vigorous and efficient government can prevent their degenerating into savages, or devouring each other like beasts of prey. A simple democracy has been very aptly compared . . . to a volcano that contained within its bowels the fiery materials of its own destruction. A citizen . . . of Switzerland . . . refused in my presence to drink 'the commonwealth of America' as a toast, and gave as a reason for it, 'that a simple democracy was the devil's own government.' The experience of the American states, under the present Confederation, has, in too many instances, justified these two accounts of a simple popular government." (Letter to Ramsay, *Letters*, Butterfield ed., p. 454.)

²⁴ Niles, *op. cit.*, p. 403.

III

Rush's concept of the POLITICAL AMERICAN REVOLUTION thus reveals him as a believer in an ideal and a means for the achievement of that ideal, namely, Free Government and Union. This combination of theoretical and practical thinking makes him a truly political personality. As such, he ranks among the great of his time. But do his ideas differ from those of his contemporaries?

In many respects Rush saw eye to eye with the Founding Fathers. His distrust of democracy was being shared by many before the Federal Convention met.²⁵ Distrust of democratic

²⁵ In his *Notes on Virginia*, Jefferson bitterly assailed that state's constitution of 1776 because of its concentration of power in the assembly which was to him "precisely the definition of despotic government," and it made no difference that such powers were vested in a numerous body "chosen by ourselves," since "one hundred and seventy-three despots" were "as oppressive as one" and "an elective despotism was not the government we fought for." *Writings*, Memorial ed., Vol. II, pp. 160 ff.); the report of the Pennsylvania Council of Censors of 1784 revealed the same point of view (*Proceedings relative to the calling of the Conventions of 1776 and 1790*, Harrisburg, 1825, pp. 83 ff.); John Adams' *Defence of the Constitutions of Government of the United States of America* was less an answer to Turgot's criticism that the American constitutions represented an unreasonable imitation of the usages of England than an exhortation to constitutional reform along the lines which Massachusetts had already taken under Adams' own guidance, not favoring the democratic element too much (Charles Francis Adams, ed., *Works*, Vol. IV, pp. 273 ff.); the fear of democratic despotism can also be seen in a letter from the Secretary of War Knox to Washington during Shays' Rebellion of October 23, 1786, in which he wrote that the insurgents' creed is "that the property of the United States has been protected from the confiscations of Britain by the joint exertions of all, and therefore ought to be common property of all; and he that attempts opposition to this creed is an enemy to equality and justice and ought to be swept from the face of the earth . . . In a word, they are determined to annihilate all debts public and private, and have agrarian laws, which are easily effected by the means of unfunded paper money, which shall be tender in all cases whatsoever. . . . This dreadful situation . . . has alarmed every man of principle and property in New England. . . . What is to give us security against the violence of lawless men? Our governments must be braced, changed or altered to secure our lives and property. . . . The men of property and of . . . station and principle . . . are determined to endeavor to establish [a government which shall have power to]

despotism was the keynote of the Philadelphia Convention.²⁶

protect them in their lawful pursuits; and, what will be efficient in all cases of internal commotions or foreign invasions, they mean that liberty shall form the basis,—liberty resulting from an equal and firm administration of the law. They wish for a general government of unity, as they see that the local legislature must necessarily tend to retard the general government. We have arrived at the point of time in which we are forced to see our own humiliation, as a nation, and that a progression in this line cannot be productive of happiness, private and public." (F. S. Drake, *Life and Correspondence of Henry Knox*. 1873, pp. 92-93).

²⁶ For the fact that most of the members of the Convention were property owners, see Charles A. Beard, *An Economic Interpretation of the Constitution* (1913); for a survey on the delegates, see Charles Warren, *The Making of the Constitution* (1947), pp. 55 ff. Still under the impression of Shays Rebellion, Theodore Sedgwick wrote Rufus King: "Every man of observation is convinced that the end of government, security, cannot be attained by the exercise of principles founded on democratic equality. A war is now actually levied on the virtue, property and distinction in the community, and however there may be an appearance of temporary cessation, yet the flame will again and again break out" (*Ibid.*, p. 231). For the fear of democratic despotism during the Convention, see also *New York Independent Journal*, June 2; *Massachusetts Centinel*, June 9; *New Hampshire Spy*, June 9, 12; *Connecticut Courant*, June 11; *Salem Mercury*, June 12; *Virginia Independent Chronicle*, June 13; *Independent Chronicle* (Boston), June 14; *American Museum*, June, 1787, I; *The Gazetteer*, the *Gazette* and the *Journal* printed an article that read: "A federal Shays may be more successful than the Shays of Massachusetts Bay. . . . This view of our situation is indeed truly alarming. We are upon the brink of a precipice." At the Convention itself, Edmund Randolph said during the discussion of the superiority of the national over the state governments, regretting that the confederation was not superior to the state constitutions: "Our chief danger arises from the democratic parts of our constitutions. . . . None of the constitutions have provided sufficient checks against democracy." (Max Farrand, ed., *The Records of the Federal Convention* (1911), Vol. I, p. 26). In the discussion on the election of the second branch of the national legislature, Sherman opposed election by the people who, he said, should have as little to do as may be about the government (*Ibid.*, p. 448). Elbridge Gerry complained that "the evils we experience flow from the excess of democracy," adding that in Massachusetts it had been confirmed by experience that the people are daily misled into the most baneful measures and opinions by the false reports circulated by designing men. Mentioning that it was a maxim of democracy to starve the public servants, he added that experience had shown that the state legislatures drawn immediately from the people did not always possess their confidence (*Ibid.*, pp. 48, 50). Pinckney moved "that the first branch of the National Legislative be elected by the State Legislatures, and not by the people," contending that the people were less fit judges. (*Ibid.*, p. 132). George Mason of Virginia

It is conspicuous in the Federalist Papers.²⁷ On the other hand, Rush shared the Fathers' belief in popular government for the protection of vested rights. He was among those who considered a more perfect union a means to push back democratic despotism.

However, his concept of the Union differed from the view held by most of his contemporaries. Patrick Henry in 1774 had said that "the distinctions between Virginians, Pennsylvanians, New Yorkers and New Englanders are no more. I am not a Virginian, but an American . . . All distinctions are thrown down. All America is thrown into one mass."²⁸ Rush in 1776 went beyond that. "We have been too free with the word independence; we are dependent on each other, not totally independent States," he said, continuing, "I would not have it understood that I am pleading the cause of Pennsylvania; when I entered that door, I considered myself a citizen of America."²⁹ Denying the independence of the states and calling himself a citizen of America, he replaced Henry's psychological concept of unity by a juristic one. Henry's word suggests Americans who, free from British colonial fetters, live in a state of nature. Rush, on the other hand, stated that the British rule had been immediately succeeded not by a sovereignty of the states, but by that of the Union, a position that was in even stronger terms reaffirmed by him shortly before the Philadelphia Convention.³⁰

While Rush's concept of the Union merits attention, his recognition of the pattern of the POLITICAL AMERICAN

spoke of "the oppression and injustice experienced . . . from democracy"; although admitting that "the genius of the people is in favor of it," he left no doubt that "we had been too democratic" (*Ibid.*, p. 49). James Wilson's statements that the ultimate power of the government must reside in the people (*Ibid.*, pp. 49, 132, 141, 151, 361) shows him only as a supporter of popular government, and not of absolute democracy.

²⁷ See my "The Political Theory of the Federalist," *Diss.* Princeton, 1952.

²⁸ Edmund Burnett, ed., *Letters of the Members of the Continental Congress*, 1921, Vol. I, pp. 14-15.

²⁹ John Adams' *Notes of Debates*, *op. cit.*, Vol. VI. p. 1081.

³⁰ See *supra*, pp. 8-9.

REVOLUTION and his anticipation of AMERICAN EVOLUTION secure him a leading position among the political figures of his time. To be sure, the pattern of revolution was seen by other people.³¹ But Rush was the first to pronounce it in so many words. Furthermore, his emphasis upon AMERICAN EVOLUTION makes him an educator of first rank. As such, he has a place beside Jefferson. The founder of Dickinson College, Rush recognized the importance of education for Free Government when in his address of 1787 he said: "To conform the principles, morals and manners of our citizens, to our republican forms of government, it is absolutely necessary, that knowledge of every kind should be disseminated through every part of the United States."³² For the realization of this plan, Rush, again demonstrating his ability to put theory into practice, proposed the establishment of a federal university and a nationwide postal system, the former being intended mainly for the training of governmental leaders,³³ the latter for the formulation of public opinion in favor of Free Government.³⁴

³¹ The same position was taken by Joel Barlow in an oration delivered at the North Church, Hartford, Connecticut, July 4, 1787. (Niles, *op. cit.*, pp. 384 ff.)

³² Niles, *op. cit.*, p. 403.

³³ "For this purpose, let congress, instead of laying out half a million of dollars, in building a federal town, appropriate only a fourth of that sum, in founding a federal university. In this university, let everything connected with government, such as history—the law of nature and nations—the civil law—the municipal laws of our country—and the principles of commerce—be taught by competent professors. Let masters be employed, like wise, to teach gunnery—fortification—and every thing connected with defensive and offensive war. Above all, let a professor of, what is called in the European universities, economy, be established in this fredeal seminary. His business should be to unfold the principles and practice of agriculture and manufactures of all kind, and to enable him to make his lectures more extensively useful, congress should support a travelling correspondent for him, who should visit all the nations of Europe, and transmit to him, from time to time, all the discoveries and improvements that are made in agriculture and manufactures. To this seminary, young men should be encouraged to repair, after completing their academic studies in the colleges of their respective states. The honours and offices of the United States should, after a while, be confined to persons who had imbibed federal and republican ideas in this university." *Ibid.*, p. 403.

³⁴ "For the purpose of diffusing knowledge, as well as extending the living

IV

The preceding pages have shown that Rush was more than the Father of American Medicine. He was a philosopher, an eighteenth-century politician, and an educator: he was a statesman. As a philosopher, he was as ardent an adversary of tyranny, be it of the monarchical or democratic brand, as he was a proponent of Free Government as that form of popular government which served for the protection of vested rights. As a politician, he conceived of the Union as the means for securing Free Government from monarchical as well as democratic despotism. What the philosopher believed and the politician realized, the educator sought to perpetuate. Belief in and establishment and perpetuation of Free Government was for Rush the essence of the American Revolution.

Were the blessings of that Revolution preserved? Since monarchical despotism was eliminated in the Revolutionary War and never since had a chance to stage a comeback, we need only consider the question whether Free Government has been preserved from democratic despotism. The answer is encouraging. When Chancellor Kent, in an effort to stem the democratic tide for the protection of vested rights, said in the New York constitutional convention of 1821 that "there is no retrograde step

principle of government to every part of the United States—every state—county—village—and township in the union, should be tied together by means of the post-office. This is the true non-electric wire of government. It is the only means of conveying heat and light to every individual in the federal commonwealth. 'Sweden lost her liberties,' says the abbe Raynal, 'because her citizens were so scattered, that they had no means of acting in concert with each other.' It should be a constant injunction to the post-masters, to convey newspapers free of all charge for postage. They are not only the vehicles of knowledge and intelligence, but the centinels of the liberty of our country." *Ibid.*, p. 403. For Rush's role as an educator, see also his *A Plan for Establishing Public Schools in Pennsylvania, and for Conducting Education Agreeably to a Republican Form of Government* (1786); *Thoughts Upon Amusements and Punishments Which are Proper for Schools* (Addressed to George Clymer, Esq., Philadelphia, 1790); *Plan of a Federal University* (*Federal Gazette*, October 29, 1788).

in the rear of democracy,"³⁵ he proclaimed a philosophy of history which admitted the inevitable capitulation of Free Government before absolute democracy. But history has proved itself stronger than this philosophy. Certainly the adoption of the Constitution had been a retrograde step in the rear of democracy, and one that served as a springboard for more to come in the ensuing period stretching from the conservative world of Chief Justice Marshall to that of Mr. Justice Sutherland. After the New Deal the Supreme Court up to 1937 took more of these retrograde steps against democratic despotism, until the "swing in time that saved nine" ushered in an era of grave concern for the adherents of Free Government. The friends of Free Government hope that the Constitution is still embodying the ideal of the American Revolution, and that the robe can still order halt to the democratic vogue. They trust that the education of the American people in the principles of the Constitution, so much desired by Rush, has borne rich fruit. They are confident that the spirit of Free Government has become so essential a part of the American political creed as to create a tradition that will bring to a halt all movements toward democratic despotism.

With America's leadership in the Western world, her tradition could not remain confined to within the nation. The establishment of modern dictatorships brought into being America's truly "New Frontiers," far away from its shores. And here a situation developed that was similar to that existing prior to the Philadelphia Convention. After fascism had been defeated in World War II, America had a rude awakening from the joys of victory. To paraphrase Rush, "in our opposition to fascism, we forgot that the temple of tyranny has two doors. We bolted one of them by proper restraints; but we left the other open, by neglecting to guard against the efforts of our own ignorance and

³⁵ *Reports of the Proceedings and Debates of the Convention of 1821. Assembled for the Purpose of Amending the Constitution of the State of New York*, Albany, 1821, pp. 219-22.

licentiousness."³⁶ With Free Government being threatened today also by democratic despotism of the communist brand, this is as critical a period of American history as that under the Articles of Confederation. And just as the American problem was then the preservation of Free Government within the thirteen states, it is today to secure Free Government for America and the world. Thus the growth in strength has brought about a growth in responsibility. But Benjamin Rush's ideas hold true today as they did in that historic year 1787: "Patriots . . . come forward! your country demands your services!—Philosophers and friends of mankind, come forward! your country demands your studies and speculations! Lovers of peace and order . . . come forward! . . . THE REVOLUTION IS NOT OVER!"³⁷

³⁶ Niles, *op. cit.*, p. 402.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 404.

DICKINSON COLLEGE
and the "BROAD BOTTOM"
of EARLY EDUCATION IN
PENNSYLVANIA

ALFRED OWEN ALDRIDGE

January 6, 1961

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Dr. Aldridge is the author of the definitive life of Thomas Paine, MAN OF REASON, published in 1959, of two earlier books, BENJAMIN FRANKLIN AND HIS FRENCH CONTEMPORARIES and SHAFTESBURY AND THE DEIST MANIFESTO, as well as of a long roster of articles in American and French journals. He holds advanced degrees from the University of Georgia, Duke University and the University of Paris, and has served as visiting professor at three American, three foreign centers of learning. Since 1947 he has been Professor of English in the College of Arts and Sciences, University of Maryland. The subject first chosen for his Spahr Lecture was "John Dickinson and Thomas Paine." In gathering material for this, however, he came upon the incident in the founding of Dickinson College which was substituted for it. The original subject will appear as a separate article.

DICKINSON COLLEGE *and the* "BROAD BOTTOM" of EARLY EDUCATION IN PENNSYLVANIA

IN March 1784, a Scottish schoolmaster who had been away from his native heath less than a year met with the Provost of the University of Pennsylvania at the Harp and Crown tavern in Philadelphia to discuss the future prospects of Dickinson College, the fledgling of new world education which had received its charter only seven months previously. Although this charter had been drawn by the eminent jurist James Wilson, the college possessed practically nothing else. The university Provost, John Ewing, and the schoolmaster, James Tod, having learned that another Scotsman still in Great Britain, Dr. Charles Nisbet, had been offered the post of Principal of Dickinson College, decided that they should suggest to him other reasons besides his dislike of ocean voyages to deter him from accepting the offer.

As a newcomer to Philadelphia and a mere free-lance teacher, Tod was scarcely in a position to advise with authority on the future of the new college, but Provost Ewing had both academic distinction and knowledge of the political climate of Pennsylvania,

In their conversation, the Provost supplied the telling arguments to dissuade Dr. Nisbet from coming to Pennsylvania and asked Tod to communicate them in a letter. His first and most important argument indicates a close relationship between the founding of Dickinson College and contemporary political and sectarian disputes concerning the University of Pennsylvania, a theme which has been touched upon but not fully developed by previous historians.¹ This evening I propose to discuss the influence of Ewing's letter and his related advocacy of a "broad and catholic bottom" in education. This attribute was being vociferously claimed at the time by the University of Pennsylvania, the institution which had superseded the colonial College of Philadelphia.²

This college had begun to lose public support in 1776 at the time that Pennsylvania drew up its first constitution, a document famous in the history of the state for its efforts to keep the government in the hands of the proletarian elements of society rather than the aristocratic or plutocratic. The outspokenly democratic party, called the "Constitutional" party, which then came into control, held a low opinion of the College of Philadelphia because of its poor war record, "its loyalist tinge, its half-hearted support of the Revolution, its Anglican and aristocratic connections, the Toryism of some of its Trustees."³ The legislature, therefore, passed a law in 1779, transforming the old college into the new University of Pennsylvania, creating a new board of Trustees, and elevating a Presbyterian minister, Dr. John Ewing, as Provost to replace the unpopular Anglican Dr. William Smith. One of the charges made against the old college

¹ Particularly by L. H. Butterfield in *Letters of Benjamin Rush* (Princeton, 1951), I, 335 ff.

² See the address of the University to Benjamin Franklin in 1785. Edward Potts Cheyney, *History of the University of Pennsylvania, 1740-1940*, (Philadelphia, 1940), p. 140.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 120.

was that it had departed from the "plan of free and unlimited catholicism" upon which it had been founded and had turned itself into an Anglican stronghold.⁴ This charge was in large measure based upon a by-law of the Trustees in 1764, specifying that none of the religious sects represented on the faculty should ever be put "on a worse footing" in respect to the upper posts in the college than they were "at the time of obtaining the royal brief." Since the Provost at that time had been an Anglican; the Vice-Provost, a Presbyterian, this effectually froze the two highest offices for these two denominations.

Tod and Ewing in their joint letter informed Nisbet that "some time ago doctor Smith and all the Episcopalian people were turned out of the college of Philadelphia, and the direction and management of it put into the hands of the Presbyterians, and that these disappointed people got doctor R[ush] to be their tool; and in August last obtained a charter from the assembly of the state, to erect this college at Carlisle. But although they obtained a charter, they got nothing else from the assembly; and although they have an agent in London, begging money for the institution, they have not got as yet one shilling of money, only two or three hundred pounds currency subscribed."⁵ Also at the moment they had "no house to teach in" even though they had plans to rent a state-owned building which had been "built during the war to hold public stores."

Ewing conjured his brother educator, therefore, that if he should accept the appointment, to get good security for the money promised by the trustees, for Nisbet might depend upon

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 122.

⁵ The sequence of events may be reconstructed from a newspaper controversy between Ewing and his enemies, particularly Benjamin Rush, which broke out in an anonymous letter vs. Ewing in the *Pennsylvania Journal*, 8 and 11 September 1784. Ewing answered in both the *Pennsylvania Packet* and the *Freeman's Journal*, 9 February 1785. Tod gave his version of the letter to Nisbet in the *Pennsylvania Packet* 17 February; reprinted in *Freeman's Journal* 2 March.

it that the trustees would not be able to pay him any more than the interest of the money which had been collected.

Finally, through his amanuensis Ewing painted a very dismal picture of "the labour annexed to the office of provost of a college in this country." Tod reported that Ewing "has to teach every day in the week, except Sunday, from nine o'clock in the morning to twelve; and except Saturday, he teaches in the afternoon from two o'clock to five; and this labour continues all the year round, except about six weeks in the heat of the summer."

In outlining to Tod details of the letter to be sent to Nisbet, Ewing particularly mentioned "what was generally understood to be the motives for applying for a charter to erect a college at Carlisle, which were, that a plan had been laid by some of those gentlemen who had been deprived of their charter, by an act of the legislature of this state, which settled the present constitution of the university of Pennsylvania. That those gentlemen, in order that they might more easily obtain a restoration of their charter from some future assembly, wanted to give the Presbyterians a college of their own at Carlisle." In other words, the disestablished Episcopalians hoped that the founding of Dickinson College would reduce opposition to their return to power in the College of Philadelphia.

Even though these may have been the "generally understood" motives for the charter of Dickinson College, one may wonder what were Ewing's motives for attempting to dissuade Nisbet from accepting the headship. His ostensible reason was simply personal friendship. He had once lived for some time in Nisbet's house in Scotland, had preached for him twice, and considered it his duty "both as a *Christian* and a *clergyman*" to put his colleague on his guard.⁶

It is hard to penetrate the motives of other human beings, particularly at the distance separating us from Ewing, but is pos-

⁶ James Tod in *Pennsylvania Packet*, 17 February.

sible that he was led by more material considerations than friendship and Christian duty. He may very well have been trying to prevent Dickinson College from developing as a rival to the University of Pennsylvania—to keep it from becoming anything more substantial than a "pretty device," a "hopeful scheme," or a "moonshine project" (phrases which he had used to describe it in another letter to an influential citizen of Pennsylvania).⁷ As the Presbyterian head of the University of Pennsylvania, he may have seen a threat to his own position if the Episcopalians were restored to control of the college. Or, as his enemies put it, he may have wished to keep control of education in the state in his own hands.

Schoolmaster Tod's reasons for accepting the task of the actual writing to Nisbet seem clear enough. Although Tod had some acquaintance with Nisbet, probably a consideration of more weighty importance was a sense of personal obligation to Provost Ewing, who had allowed him to teach his own students in a classroom of the University of Pennsylvania. Undoubtedly he was easily swayed to the provost's point of view.

Nisbet, who had been on the verge of accepting the offer from Dickinson, was shocked and flabbergasted by Ewing's communication. Although it had been signed by Tod, Nisbet took it for granted that Ewing had been the author. From Benjamin Rush, who had conducted all the correspondence on behalf of his fellow trustees of Dickinson College, Nisbet had previously heard nothing but glowing reports and flattering prospects for the school. Now he was in a quandary. Which were true, the representations of Rush or Ewing?

He immediately wrote an anguished letter to Rush demanding an explanation. If, as he had been told, "the Presbyterians have turned out the Episcopalians at Philadelphia," what guarantee would he have that the Episcopalians would not turn out the

⁷ Quoted by Benjamin Rush, *Pennsylvania Packet* 17 February; reprinted *Freeman's Journal* 23 February.

Presbyterians at Carlisle? "One would imagine," he wrote, "that as the education of youth is an object of prime importance in every state, *some security would be given* by the public, that those employed in it should not be cast out of their office while they faithfully performed their duty. Perhaps my ignorance of your affairs may mislead me, but I would chuse to be informed more fully about them. There may be *some mystery* in Dr. Ewing's not signing the letter in question, but of this I cannot judge. It does not seem credible to me, that Dr. R—— is a person that would condescend to be the tool of any party, or that gentlemen of probity and reputation would join in inviting a man who had never injured them, to a place that should prove ruinous to his family."⁸ Nisbet was a little perplexed about Ewing's motives in writing to him, although one of his Scottish friends, Lady Leven, was inclined to accept the Provost's good faith. "How do you know," she wrote, but that Dr. Ewing "is in the right and that he is really your friend, in dissuading you from going."⁹

What must have astounded Nisbet was to have religion introduced as a political motive in a dispute involving only Presbyterians. Paradoxically, the founding of a Presbyterian college was being construed by Ewing, a Presbyterian clergyman, as an anti-Presbyterian measure of an Episcopalian faction.

Benjamin Rush, the leading force in the establishment of Dickinson, had affiliations with both Presbyterians and Episcopalians, but at this time considered himself a Presbyterian. Although all the other principals on both sides in the controversy over the founding of Dickinson were Presbyterians, Anglican control of the former College of Philadelphia was being raised into a burning issue. Nobody involved openly admitted sectarian motives, yet all accused the other side of prejudice, if not outright bigotry.

⁸ Quoted by Benjamin Rush, *Pennsylvania Packet* 17 February.

⁹ Samuel Miller, *Memoir of the Rev. Charles Nisbet, D.D.* (New York, 1840), p. 106.

THE "BROAD BOTTOM" OF EARLY EDUCATION IN PENNSYLVANIA

Two or three weeks before receiving Nisbet's agonizing letter, Rush himself had written to the principal-elect, giving his own version of the University of Pennsylvania and state politics. Their letters crossed somewhere in mid-Atlantic. Rush's account has been described by L. H. Butterfield in a previous Spahr lecture, as "a wonderful combination of unassailable facts, shrewd observations, slander, half-truths, and rigged statistics."¹⁰ Rush accused the Constitutional party of seizing the College of Philadelphia "with all its funds" in 1778, an act "contrary to justice and policy and even contrary to their own Constitution." The leaders in this "most nefarious business," he charged, were Dr. Ewing, George Bryan, and Joseph Reed, then president of the state, and he added that "Dr. Ewing, as the reward of his activity in this fraudulent act, was honored with the provost's chair." According to Rush, when Ewing and his cohorts learned of the scheme to promote Dickinson College, they reacted with "fear and indignation," doing all they could to keep it from being chartered. "Dr. Ewing wished to hold the key of all the learning in the State in his hands. They all dreaded the effects of a good education upon their narrow schemes, for they knew thirty-eight out of forty of the trustees were opposed to them in politics and would inculcate principles contrary to their wild and interested ideas of policy and government."

Since Rush had already thus thoroughly discredited Ewing, he turned over to John Dickinson, president of the board of trustees of the college, the task of further assuaging Nisbet's fears. Dickinson wrote a typical administrator's letter, calm and moderate. Without referring to Ewing by name, Dickinson regretted that "so good a Design as we are engaged in, should have Enemies in our own State; one of whom, it seems, has tho't himself

¹⁰ "Benjamin Rush and the Beginnings of 'John and Mary's College' over Susquehanna," in *Bulwark of Liberty* (Carlisle, 1950), p. 34.

under Obligations to give you an unfavorable and invidious account of our undertaking."¹¹

He pointed out that the original notion of establishing a college in the western side of the Susquehanna had been conceived "long before the political Parties, which now so much distract the Commonwealth had any Existence."¹² Its future growth, therefore, would have nothing to do with the sectarian struggle in the University of Pennsylvania. Dickinson enclosed a copy of the college charter so that Nisbet could see that all principles concerning the internal regulation of the college were to depend upon laws to be drawn up by the trustees—in which Nisbet would have a prominent hand, if he accepted the presidency. Nisbet's duties, therefore, would depend in large measure upon the laws still to be made, but undoubtedly he would be expected to give "a presidential Inspection over the whole" as well as a particular attention to one or two branches of learning. This would require that "some Part of every Day, for common, be applied in the actual Business of lecturing or teaching. But it may be depended upon, that no unreasonable or dishonorable Services will be required."

Assuming that this clarification should be sufficient to set Nisbet's mind at rest, Dickinson closed with the pious hope that God would direct his choice and the result would be to His glory.

Although Rush had allowed Dickinson to continue the negotiations with Nisbet, he took upon himself to expose in Pennsylvania Ewing's double dealing. He wrathfully accused the Provost of malicious meddling and circulated Nisbet's letter to reveal the extent of his perfidy.

¹¹ Dickinson to Nisbet, September 29, 1784. Manuscript in Dickinson College Library.

¹² Dickinson seems to have been alone in tracing the sentiment for the college to an earlier period. Rush was in substantial agreement with Ewing that Dickinson College was conceived as a result of the dispossessing of the original trustees of the College of Philadelphia. L. H. Butterfield ed., *Letters*, I, 337.

A member of the Pennsylvania Assembly then took it up and used it in a letter to a newspaper, the *Pennsylvania Journal*, with the design of persuading the legislature to restore the charter of the College of Philadelphia to its former trustees.¹³ The writer's main point was that Ewing had been the one responsible for narrowing the foundation of the College of Philadelphia, that the by-law regulating the religious affiliations of the faculty had not been an artful stratagem of the Episcopalians, as it was usually considered. According to his indictment, Ewing had suggested to the then Vice Provost, the highly respected Presbyterian Dr. Francis Alison, that since the Episcopalians had recently collected an enormous sum of money for the college, they might seize that moment to exclude "all others from the government of it." Ewing thereupon allegedly prevailed upon the unsuspecting Alison to seek assurances from the trustees and the Anglican hierarchy in England that no party should thereafter "be put on a worse foundation than before." The writer's purpose in charging Ewing with bigotry was to make William Smith and the former trustees of the college appear pure and white by contrast. In reference to Ewing's assuming the office of provost, the anonymous writer charged: "if Dr. Ewing could have had patience to wait for Dr. Smith's death or resignation, he might possibly have succeeded to his place without the help of sanctified robbery, under colour of law to possess himself of another man's house and clear-earned emoluments."

The letter to Nisbet was introduced in this context, accompanied with a plea to restore the college to its "first founders" so that it would not be left in the hands of those like Ewing who "triumph" that they have narrowed its foundations "by turning out the Episcopalians, and giving it to the Presbyterians."

At the time this attack appeared in the press Ewing was off on a journey in the western part of the state on "public service"

¹³ 8 and 11 September 1784.

to settle the boundary of Pennsylvania and hence out of touch with Philadelphia journalism. His enemies, however, kept track of his activities. A correspondent in another newspaper reported that as a consequence of his traveling on Sunday, he had been fined by a western magistrate for Sabbath-breaking.¹⁴ After subsequent denials and retorts by pro and anti-Ewing factions, it was conceded that it was Ewing's waggoner who had been fined¹⁵ a concession which did little to remove Ewing from the disgrace of violating the Sabbath.

When he returned to Philadelphia five months later, Ewing published a long communication in the *Pennsylvania Packet* (9 February 1785) attempting to clear himself from the charge of religious bigotry: he stated "that I never *dictated, read, heard, nor saw* the letter [to Nisbet], that it never was written under *my eye, nor in my house*, as they have falsely asserted, that I never so much as heard from Mr. Tod, a single *sentiment or expression* that it contained." To back up his denial, he asserted that he had not himself known some of the information it contained concerning Dickinson College—that it must have come from Tod who was better acquainted with Dickinson than he was, for Tod had turned down a teaching post there when it had been offered by Benjamin Rush. The resolution of writing to Nisbet had been Tod's, he affirmed, but he admitted that he approved of the plan.

In regard to the crucial sentence concerning Smith and all the Episcopalians being turned out of the College of Pennsyl-

¹⁴ *Independent Gazetteer*, 28 August 1784.

¹⁵ *Independent Gazetteer*, 11 September 1784. Ewing's memorandum book makes no reference to any legal difficulties, although it makes clear that Ewing on horse-back traveled faster than his wagons and often ahead of them. "Memorandum Book of Dr. John Ewing with Account of a Journey to settle the boundary of Penna., May, 1784," *Pennsylvania Archives*, 6th Series XIV (1907), 1-20. Rush in a letter to Nisbet, 27 August 1784, repeated the story of Ewing's servant being fined "for driving his wagon on the Sabbath day, if not by his order, *certainly* by his permission." He added that Ewing "has been seen reeling in our streets." *Letters*, I, 338.

vania, Ewing denied not only his own authorship but the truth of the statement, making much of its obvious falsity as *prima facie* evidence that he would have known better and therefore could not have written it himself. It must be admitted that the statement is not literally exact, but as a view of practical results it is accurate. According to Ewing's literal correction, "there was not a single person removed from the trust or superintendence of the former college of Philadelphia, by the assembly of this commonwealth, on account of his being of any religious persuasion whatsoever; that the whole board of trustees, consisting of various denominations were removed at once without discrimination; and that the principal reason given by the assembly, in their law, for the removal of the former board of trustees, together with their provost, Dr. Smith, was because they had, in violation of their public faith, narrowed the broad and catholic bottom of the institution."

Ewing then turned his attention to Rush, accusing him of dishonesty in spreading a letter which attributed such a "notorious falsehood" to him. Rush's malignant purpose, he charged, had been to expose Ewing to abuse for "the illiberality of sentiment, which it would have contained, upon the supposition that it was true." But Ewing maintained that his own sentiments and language had ever been of a contrary tenor. "Ever since I knew any thing of a civil or religious liberty, I have abhorred the idea of raising one denomination of Christians above another, merely on account of their peculiar opinions."

This letter brought Benjamin Rush into the open with a blistering personal attack on Ewing, whom he described as a vindictive and malicious enemy of Dickinson College.

Rush, who was then Professor of Chemistry at the University of Pennsylvania, probably had more enemies than any other prominent citizen in Pennsylvania after the Revolution. Presumably he was easily excited, and in these moments he spat and sputtered, thereby acquiring the appellation of Dr. Froth,

by which both friends and enemies knew him. He was notorious for his "sprightly imagination," often "leaping before the judgment."

A contemporary newspaper squib portrayed him holding forth in a local gathering, declaiming with rage and fury alternately on opposing sides of several questions, including the merits of Presbyterians. "He frothed at the mouth and all I could gather from him was that he seemed to think they had monstrous long teeth and that they had often shewn them in the course of the late revolution."¹⁶ But when a new arrival joined the company, Rush took him aside and completely changed his tone. "I overheard him mention something of about uniting the Presbyterians in Pennsylvania; of Carlisle College; glorious establishment and Doctor Nesbitt." After this episode showing Rush in action, the writer presented a sharp analysis of his character. A violent Party man, Rush is portrayed as "changeable as the wind, fickle as the water, unstable as the ocean . . . He is contemptible in every point of view but one. *He is a mischievous and implacable enemy.* Tho' he contradicts himself ten times in a minute, yet if any one also contradict him, he is sure to attempt some mean revenge. A LIE is generally his instrument. The press or private conversation are alike the vehicles of his poison."

This was the man Ewing was up against.

Rush began his reply in mild terms, however, listing calmly and objectively the motives which had led him to propose in 1782 the establishment of a college at Carlisle.¹⁷ 1) Considering literature as "absolutely necessary to preserve liberty" in Pennsylvania, he had concluded that a college near the center of the state "would be the best bulwark of the blessings obtained by the revolution." 2) The University of Pennsylvania in Philadelphia was too remote from the frontier counties, he felt, to be of service to them, and the expense of a city education was "too great to

¹⁶ A Traveller in *Freeman's Journal* 9 February 1785.

¹⁷ *Pennsylvania Packet* 17 February 1785.

be borne by the ordinary profits of a farm in Pennsylvania." 3) In contemplating the manners of the inhabitants of the middle and western counties of the state, he had lamented that learning here bore so small a ratio to labor, and he wished that something could be done to produce that balance between them "which is absolutely necessary to the happiness and prosperity of every country." These, he said, were his personal motives. When he had propounded them to the leading Presbyterians of the counties of Cumberland and York, they had added an additional reason. "They considered the college of Philadelphia as unjustly taken from its original owners through the influence of two or three members of their body, and as they did not wish to share in the advantages of obloquy of that action, they preferred the establishment of a seminary in a place more convenient to their numbers, without fraud or violence, and which they expected they would always hold without censure or complaint." Rush and Ewing agreed on at least one point: that the founding of Dickinson would have a favorable influence on the case of the dispossessed trustees of the College of Philadelphia.

According to Rush, when Ewing, George Bryan, secretary of the Pennsylvania Assembly, and Joseph Reed, learned of Rush's plan for a college at Carlisle, they all wrote letters to their friends "condemning the project in the harshest terms" and execrating Rush as the originator of it. But despite their opposition, the charter was granted in September 1783.

From that time on, according to Rush, Ewing became his implacable enemy, pronouncing innumerable and complicated calumnies against him. Rush's recital of Ewing's alleged malevolence revealed that his own powers of denunciation were at least the equal of the Provost's. "There is scarcely a family in the circle of his acquaintance in which he has not traduced me. I could mention one instance of his malice that discovers such a malignity of heart, and such an ingenuity in vice, as would make a man of feeling wish that he belonged to another species of beings, that

he might not call such a man his brother." Rush was so persuaded of the implacability of Ewing's rancor that he accused him of being the author of the numerous newspaper attacks against him which had appeared during the last two or three years.

As evidence of Ewing's animosity toward Dickinson College, Rush cited his inveighing against it at a meeting of the synod, and his recommending for principal of the college, William Hazlitt, father of the famous English prose writer, who was known as a "thorough paced SOCINIAN." To recommend a heterodox clergyman for the headship, Rush interpreted as a manifestation of the subtlety of Ewing's malice against Dickinson. As his most weighty evidence, Rush reprinted Nisbet's letter containing Ewing's arguments to dissuade the harassed Scotsman from accepting the call to Dickinson. In footnotes to the letter he repeated his accusations charging Bryan and Ewing with being the prime movers in overthrowing the administration of the College of Philadelphia. Bryan, he charged, acted as principal agent in the Assembly, and Ewing "used to visit the members . . . at the country taverns between morning and afternoon worship on Sundays, in order to urge them to pass the bill into a law for taking away the college."

In his concluding remarks, Rush replied to the critics who had charged that Dickinson College had been "set on foot for interested purposes, by a party." Even if this were true, Rush insisted, "a wise man should rejoice in feeling even party prejudices rendered subservient to the purposes of promoting literature in the state." But Rush categorically denied any party bias in the college. He admitted that he himself had opposed the Pennsylvania constitution of 1776, but he insisted that its proponents had also been invited to join in setting up the college. And some of them had become members of the board of trustees and were considered "among the most active and zealous friends of the institution." If larger numbers of the "Constitutionalists" had failed to give their support to Dickinson, it was because they had

been dissuaded from doing so "by advice from Philadelphia."

Adopting heavy irony, Rush then replied to the charge of "the catholic friends of the catholic university of Philadelphia" that the college of Carlisle was confined chiefly to the Presbyterians. Rush explained that local circumstances dictated this condition—an overwhelming majority of the inhabitants of Cumberland and the neighboring counties were Presbyterian. "But the charter of the college holds out equal privileges and honors to every sect of Christians." Rush would admit no evil whatsoever in the undue proportion of Presbyterians in the board if this circumstance should be—as he was sure it was—"the means of exciting a regard to religion and morality, even by the subordinate motive of a predilection to a particular church." With perhaps uncalled for acerbity, Rush maintained that "there is a catholicism in religion, which flows more from a total indifference to it, or from downright infidelity, than from the charitable spirit of the gospel." With a great show of fairness, Rush would not declare "that the university of Pennsylvania, upon its present catholic bottom, is founded upon this artificial virtue," but he would affirm "that in the present state of human nature, the attempt to unite all religious sects in one college, will be found to be as difficult of execution, as it is plausible and popular in speculation. Like the image in Nebuchadnezzar's dream, which was made up of so many different materials, it must soon yield to the variety of its composition." Here Rush was retaliating Ewing's charges of starry-eyed idealism, finding cause to apply them to the University of Pennsylvania instead of to Dickinson College.

In the *Pennsylvania Packet* the day after Rush's blast, James Tod, the schoolmaster, presented his version of the letter to Nisbet, a clarification which he felt was necessary to remove him from the imputation of telling a notorious falsehood. Since he had introduced his letter to Nisbet with the words, "I am requested by doctor Ewing," the latter's declaration in the press

that "he never *dictated, heard nor knew,*" any thing of the contents of the letter indicated that one of them had strayed from the truth. Tod declared, therefore, that he and Ewing had had a conversation, the substance of which had been included in the letter to Nisbet. As an additional circumstance, Tod revealed that Ewing had spoken of a letter then in his possession "from a gentleman in this city, offering him the office of provost of this new college, provided he would give up the place he now held in the university of Pennsylvania; and that this letter also contained a threatening, that if he did not comply with this request, he might abide by the consequence, for in a certain limited time, which was mentioned, there would not be a Presbyterian in any office in the state of Pennsylvania."

The natural question which would rise to anyone's mind is why did Ewing himself not write the letter of warning to Nisbet rather than leaving it in the hands of Tod, whose brief residence in America might lead Nisbet to distrust his observations. The explanation which Tod offered was that a ship was due to sail the next day and that "if Doctor Nisbet was not informed by this conveyance, the invitation from the trustees would, probably, reach him before any other opportunity offered." And since Ewing was engaged to spend the whole evening with a group or society which was to meet within the hour, he had asked Tod to write the letter, but to use his name and tell Nisbet that they had discussed the question that very evening.

In comparison with the letters of Rush and Ewing, Tod's to the *Packet* was moderate and conciliatory in tone, but he clearly indicated that he felt that his confidence had been abused both by the first correspondent who had made public Nisbet's letter and by Ewing who had tried to divorce himself from the letter to Nisbet.

After Ewing read the published remarks of Tod and Rush, he returned to the fray, defending himself primarily from the odium of being responsible for the most offensive sentence in the

letter to Nisbet: "Some time ago, Dr. Smith and all the Episcopal people were turned out of the college of Philadelphia, and the direction and management of it put into the hands of the Presbyterians."¹⁸ This was the sentence, Ewing wrote, "which raised the clamours of my fellow citizens and the indignation of populace, and furnished Dr. Rush with his exalted triumph, that after watching for me, for two or three years, he had at length found out the Reverend Rascal, openly avowing a flagrant piece of injustice and triumphing in it." Ewing accepted the broad outlines of Tod's version of how the letter had come to be written, but insisted that he had had nothing to do with the offending sentence. The sentiment was Tod's alone, he charged, or perhaps Tod had derived it from Rush "with whom he frequently conversed." Rush was the great villain. And to make his villainy worse, Rush, instead of attempting to excuse himself, had, according to Ewing, let loose a "new flood of abuse, equally replete with falsehood and misrepresentation; calling me the Devil or Great Dragon that stood ready to devour his new born infant the Carlisle college, talking of the subtlety and ingenuity of my malice against it, in recommending a president for it, with design to destroy it by his heresy; and representing me as worse than any of the human species."

This was Ewing's justification for proceeding to give his version of what he considered Rush's duplicity. When the university of Pennsylvania had been "restored to its broad bottom," he began, Rush had approved of the measure as much as any man in the state. He had even praised Ewing's appointment as Provost and solicited a professorship for himself. And, finally, he had asked Ewing to intercede with Joseph Reed, then President of the State, in behalf of his brother Jacob Rush, who wished to be appointed attorney general. In order to pave the way for his appointment, Rush had affirmed that he and his brother had given

¹⁸ *Pennsylvania Packet*, 18 February 1785.

up their opposition to the constitution—that they had previously been in error. But after their solicitation failed, Rush returned “to his former opposition to the constitution and to its friends.” Ewing interpreted Rush’s plans for Dickinson College, therefore, as an anti-Ewing, anti-Constitutional party manoeuver. Ewing specifically charged that Rush projected “his scheme of erecting the Carlisle college; with an express intention to remove not only me, but also all the Presbyterians from any share in the university.” Rush was so anxious to accomplish this design, Ewing charged, that “he had at his house Dr. Smith, whom I have frequently heard him vilify in the most unequivocal terms, in consultation, together with those that favoured his idle pretensions, contriving how to influence the members of the late assembly to accomplish their plan.” Ewing had also documentary evidence, a letter by Rush containing a sentence in which he made the connection between the University of Pennsylvania and Dickinson College: “I am happy in an opportunity of acknowledging, that a conviction of the reasonableness of the claims of the old trustees respecting the college, and an attention to the prejudices of the people at large, as well as to the declarations of some leading members of the assembly of both parties in favour of those claims, have led me to recommend to the Presbyterians within my circle of influence, to anticipate the future justice of the state, by giving up the university to its original owners.”

Ewing would not declare whether Rush had adopted his scheme in order to injure him “and the whole Presbyterian denomination” or “to ingratiate himself with his political party, whom he had lately deserted, and whose favor he again wished to court.” But Ewing “viewed him in the light of an under agent employed by some bigots who could not bear that other denominations should be upon an equal footing with themselves, to use his influence among the Presbyterians, to engage them to be contented with a charter for a college appropriated to themselves, in lieu of their share in the university.”

Ewing admitted that he disapproved of the new college "both on account of the narrowness of the plan, and its tending to excite jealousies and dissensions among the different denominations of Christians in the state." But he had maintained a strict hands-off policy, giving neither assistance nor opposition except for his proposing of Hazlitt as pastor of the Congregation of Carlisle. Seeing no need for answering Rush's allegation on this subject, he remarked merely that Hazlitt had come to him very highly recommended, had preached for him often, and had never in this capacity expressed a single unorthodox sentiment.

Rush, who was not a man to be satisfied with the second last word, immediately sent another letter to the *Pennsylvania Packet*, calling attention to the "unchristian spirit" of Ewing's letter as sufficient evidence in itself that Ewing had dictated every sentence of the letter to Nisbet.¹⁹

As usual Rush was vigorous and voluble, but we shall pass over his version of the soliciting of the government post for his brother, his congratulating Ewing for being made provost of the university, and his applying for the chair of chemistry. Of major importance for us is his opinion that "the security of the charter of Dickinson college and of all the other literary and religious institutions of the state" was "intimately connected with the restitution of the college of Philadelphia, to its original owners."

Rush categorically denied that his project for Dickinson College had anything to do with the influence over him of "a few Episcopal Bigots in Philadelphia," but he admitted the truth of the statement in the letter to Nisbet "that the Presbyterians turned the Episcopalians out of the college of Philadelphia." Paradoxically, Rush affirmed that this was the only true statement in the letter, whereas Ewing had declared that it was the only false one. Rush declared that he had not spoken with any member of the Episcopal church about Dickinson College until the plan had

¹⁹ 2 March 1785,

been fully adopted by the Presbyterians John Montgomery, William Maclay, Robert M'Pherson and other members of the assembly. At the same time he had taken no steps whatsoever to promote the restoration of the College of Philadelphia to its original trustees, although he heartily approved of this measure and rejoiced in the prospects of its success. Adopting a moderate tone, he added that he had no wish to see the least violence offered to the independent operation of the university (where he was a professor) apart from the restoration of the funds of the college to their original trustees.

In conclusion Rush introduced a pious maxim: "it belongs to man to bring evil out of good, but to God it belongs to bring good out of evil." As examples of this principle, he cited Washington College and St. John's College in Maryland, Dickinson College in Carlisle, and the Episcopal academy in Philadelphia, "all rising out of the act for taking away the college of Philadelphia."

Another result of the controversy, perhaps not so welcome to Rush, was a brilliant squib written by Francis Hopkinson, the Philadelphia Addison. Hopkinson portrayed a "professional battle" between Rush and Ewing over their rival systems of education in the course of which "the divine throws texts of scripture in the face of his adversary, and hampers him with the cords of logical conclusions; whilst the physician squirts clysters at the divine, and claps cantharides on his back."²⁰

Most comical is the climactic scene. "The learned divine *hoists* the university, and exposing its naked skin, exclaims with admiration—'Oh charming! behold and see what a broad bottom is here!' Whereupon the physician immediately *hoists Dickenson* [sic] *college*, and with equal eloquence descants upon its narrow *bottom*.—'Look, says the divine, on this capacious disk—on the one side sits the *pope*; on the other side sits *Luther*; and see how

²⁰ *Miscellaneous Essays* (Philadelphia 1792), II, 142-143.

snug *Calvin* lies between them both.' 'Its all wrong, replies the physician, *Calvin* has no business there: he will be squeezed to death—here is a fine *narrow bottom* more fit for his accommodation. He can have it all to himself—he is a *usurper* there, but this is his own flesh and blood.' From words they proceed to blows. The divine is heated with zeal seven times hotter than Nebuchadnezzar's furnace: he vociferates—"The sword of the Lord and of Gideon!" and forthwith flogs away on the narrow bottom of poor *Carlisle*. The physician is also enraged. 'By the bones of Boerhaave, and the dust of Hypocrates, says he, I will be even with you:' and without further prelude, falls to scourging the pope, Luther, and Calvin all at once upon the broad bottom of the university."

Dickinson College had indeed been launched in a stormy atmosphere, and the attendant publicity could hardly be considered favorable. Subsequently, however, the press carried more propitious tidings. On the joyous occasion of the ninth anniversary of the independence of the United States, while Nisbet was making his triumphal entry into the town of Carlisle,²¹ John Dickinson, as president of the state, gave an elaborate reception in Philadelphia at his house on Market Street. At this time his friend Dr. Froth (i. e. Rush) unable to keep a secret, to which he was pledged, divulged to some elderly ladies that Dickinson had made a donation to the college of not less than 1500 pounds value as well as executing "a deed to doctor Nisbit, to allow Mrs. Nisbit £50 per ann. after the decease of the Doctor: as an additional recompence for the Doctor's accepting the Principal's chair."²²

And two months earlier the students of the College's first year had given a public exhibition of their prowess in classical languages, arithmetic and geometry. After this display, a number

²¹ James Henry Morgan, *Dickinson College The History of One Hundred and Fifty Years 1783-1933* (Carlisle, 1933), p. 36.

²² *Freeman's Journal*, 6 July 1785.

of students entertained the highly satisfied and attentive audience with "some very pretty specimens of oratory."²³ This was considered in the *Freeman's Journal* to be a harbinger of the great things to be expected at Dickinson when a sufficient number of professors should be appointed to carry on a complete system of education.

Great numbers, we have reason to believe, will croud to this place, as soon as the college is completely organized; where they may acquire the most useful knowledge on the most reasonable terms. It is pleasing to think what immense advantage may be derived from this institution not only to this state, but to the United States, and to mankind in general. LEARNING, that has been travelling from age to age, from the rising towards the setting of the sun, has, by the erection of a college here, made one other glorious step in her progress.

(And in conclusion, may I echo the sentiments of this eighteenth-century newspaper)

May she never cease, until she has encircled the globe, and carried her chearing light to all nations!

²³ *Freeman's Journal*, 2 May 1785.

JOSEPH PRIESTLEY'S AMERICAN EDUCATION

ROBERT E. SCHOFIELD

May 6, 1960

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Formerly in the military service as a physicist in the development of the atom bomb at Oak Ridge, and then as a civilian in commercial research, Dr. Schofield turned from Science to the history of Science in 1955. He was for five years on the faculty of the University of Kansas. In 1960 he became Associate Professor of Humanities and Social Studies at the Case Institute of Technology. He is the author of numerous articles on the history of science in 17th and 18th century England. In these, and in his project of a definitive life of Joseph Priestley, he has had the support of grants from the National Science Foundation, the American Philosophical Society and as a Fulbright Scholar and a John Simon Guggenheim Fellow.

JOSEPH PRIESTLEY'S AMERICAN EDUCATION

IT is with no small hesitation that I face a Dickinson audience with yet another talk on Joseph Priestley, for Dickinson must surely be tired of Priestley by now. Indeed Dickinson, or at least its President, was already tired of Priestley before he had been in the United States a year. ". . . I wish he had rather fixed his Residence in Botany Bay," President Nisbet wrote in October 1794, ". . . as I think our People are got Mad enough already."¹ After this more than century old weariness, Dickinson might well ask, "Why do we hear so much of Dr. Priestley?" In 1783 this question was asked by Dr. Samuel Johnson and received the answer, ". . . because we are indebted to him for . . . important discoveries." Johnson's response was a grudging, ". . . let every man have the honour he has merited."² Priestley's merited honor, however, goes beyond the chemical discoveries which earned him the unwilling respect of Johnson. The contributions of that amazing man in theology, in politics, and in education won him as much attention, in his own time, as his science has won him since. If his contemporaries failed always to approve his views, they

¹ Letter of Charles Nisbet to the Earl of Buchan, 15 October 1794, Dickinson College Archives.

² Quoted in Boswell's *Life of Samuel Johnson, LL.D.* (New York, E. P. Dutton & Co., Everyman Edition, 1906), vol. 2, p. 481.

were, at least, never bored by them. In this present excursion into Priestley's American activities, I will try not to break Priestley's own record.

When Joseph Priestley landed at the Old Battery in New York harbor, on the 4th of June 1794, he had arrived in the one country of the western world which had always known him more for his non-scientific work than for his science. In England and in Europe he had, at length, become the scientist whose politics and theology it was impossible longer to ignore. The political activities which had, since 1789, earned Priestley the hatred of his countrymen, driven him from his home and finally from his country, had temporarily focused every European's attention on Priestley, the political philosopher and heretic theologian. These recent events were reflected in the many welcoming addresses which greeted Priestley on his arrival in New York.³ The same addresses naturally referred to his scientific work, but in most of them there were also overtones of the persistent support to the American Revolution and to political liberalism for which the United States had always known Priestley.

If one examines a bibliography of Priestley's works, one finds that at least twelve editions of some seven different books by Priestley had been printed in the colonies or the United States before he arrived. None of these books were scientific. Most of them were political—his criticism of Blackstone's *Commentaries* on English law was printed in four editions, his *Address to Protestant Dissenters*, written to support the colonists in 1774, was printed in Boston and in Philadelphia within the year, his *Letter to the Rt. Hon. Edmund Burke*, supporting the French Revolution, was reprinted in New York the year it first appeared in England. There were also editions of one of Priestley's educational texts and of three of his less extreme theological works.

Of course, Priestley's scientific works were not unknown.

³ Quoted in Edgar F. Smith, *Priestley in America, 1794-1804* (Philadelphia, P. Blakeston's Son & Co., 1920), pp. 20-40.

Copies of his scientific books and papers, printed in England, were shipped to many persons and institutions in the United States. But Americans were content to receive, in this indirect way, those scientific works printed in many editions in England; translated, quoted, and abstracted throughout Europe. Science was a luxury even to the American intellectual while politics and theology were the mental food and drink of almost everyone in the country.

There was to be no change in the situation, after Priestley had settled in the United States. The greater proportion of Priestley's published work in England had been non-scientific. His American publications show an even greater emphasis in this direction. Of the fifty-two editions of Priestley's books and pamphlets printed in the United States between 1794 and 1806, only six were on science and one of those was a French translation, published by another man. There were, it is true, many scientific papers which appeared in the *Transactions* of the American Philosophical Society (eleven in all) or in the *New York Medical Repository* (more than fifteen), but all the pages in all the scientific papers and books written by Priestley while in the United States add to less than the total in any one of several of his works of theology.

The importance of scientific work cannot be measured in number of pages, but this does suggest the subordinate position of science in Priestley's work and, by any criterion, Priestley's American science was of little significance. His continued attacks on the theory of oxidation were finally noticed and he had the great pleasure of forcing acceptance of some of his criticism, but even this success served only to strengthen the oxidation theory. Priestley's "discovery" of carbon monoxide belongs more correctly to Cruikshank, who fitted the discovery into the new theory and once again demonstrated, to Priestley's dismay, that experimental work is the handmaiden not the source of theory. Priestley's science in the United States was an anti-climax.

In retrospect, Priestley's American theological activities were also anti-climactic. This was, of course, not apparent to the many preachers who attacked Priestley and his ideas, earnest bigots like the New York minister who knelt beside his pulpit, before a crowded congregation, to pray for special divine protection now "that a Priestley has entered the land." Nor was it apparent to the warring sectaries who, during the next fifty years, could combine only to harass and nearly close colleges like Dickinson and South Carolina, universities like Pennsylvania, Transylvania, and Virginia because they had on their faculties friends of Priestley and Unitarians. Though he devoted the greater part of his time and the output of his pen to theology after he arrived in the United States, the significant influence of Priestley's theological studies had already been achieved before he arrived. Through the agency of his friend, Theophilus Lindsey, copies of Priestley's books on theology had been sent to Harvard and the Boston area. These, and the influence of a Priestley convert, William Hazlitt, had already produced a number of "liberal" congregations in and around Boston. But, though they used some of his writings and reprinted some of his books, Priestley's ideas were then too radical for Boston churches. When the great Unitarian movement began in America, under the leadership of Channing, Priestley's work had already become too conservative. The sole public influence of Priestley's theological work was the establishment in Philadelphia after 1796 of the first avowedly Unitarian society in the United States—a society which ultimately became the First Unitarian Church of Philadelphia.⁴ Privately his influence may have been much greater. John Adams was a frequent reader of Priestley's theology, Thomas Jefferson rested his religious convictions on the writings of Priestley and Conyers Middleton, and, if the Baptists, Presbyterians, and Methodists of early nineteenth century

⁴ Earl Morse Wilbur, *A History of Unitarianism* (Cambridge, Mass., Harvard University Press, 1952), pp. 391-400.

JOSEPH PRIESTLEY'S AMERICAN EDUCATION

America can be believed, every college in the country was a sinning seed-bed of Unitarianism.⁵

What successes Priestley achieved in America were in the field of education. Even here his efforts initially appear singularly futile. Two weeks after his arrival in New York, Priestley went to Philadelphia and, by the end of July, he, his family, household possessions, library, and laboratory equipment had made the five day trip to Northumberland, almost 150 miles from Philadelphia up the Susquehanna. Priestley had hardly more than become provisionally settled when he received an official invitation to become Professor of Chemistry at the University of Pennsylvania. His *Memoirs* and correspondence suggest a number of his reasons for rejecting the offer: Philadelphia was too expensive a place to live, it was unhealthy, if his library and laboratory had not already been transported to Northumberland he would have accepted, Mrs. Priestley had acquired a dread of cities from her experience in Birmingham, finally he did not know enough chemistry to teach a full course of it and was too old to learn. None of these excuses ring quite true. If he could afford to live at Northumberland on no income, he could have lived in Philadelphia with the additional income of a salary. He knew that he was being considered for the post when he undertook to send his belongings to Northumberland. Mrs. Priestley had lived for almost three years in a suburb of London, in spite of her dread of cities, and Priestley had lectured on chemistry to the students of Hackney Academy and published *Heads of Lectures on a Course of Experimental Philosophy, particularly including Chemistry* (London, 1794). Priestley's rejection of the teaching post in Philadelphia becomes clear only when we find why he settled in Northumberland.

Though it appeared that Priestley had buried himself in a backwoods community, isolating himself from cultured society

⁵ Zoltan Haraszti, *John Adams and the Prophets of Progress* (Cambridge, Harvard University Press, 1952), pp. 283-4 and *passim*.

and from institutions he might otherwise have aided, appearances were deceiving. Shortly there was to grow, on the banks of the Susquehanna, an enlightened Utopia, a Pantisocracy of rational Christians, of cultured, liberal Englishmen, of which Priestley was to be the minister and teacher. What happened to this community of poets, saints, and scholars? It never existed except in the naive idealism and homesick longings of Dr. Priestley, the fervid imaginations of Southey and Coleridge, and the self-deluded promotions of Joseph Priestley Jr., Thomas Cooper, and their friends.⁶

The project grew out of the political repression and reaction of an England frightened by the French Revolution. Between the Birmingham Riots of July 1791 and the abortive treason trial of Thomas Hardy, John Horne Tooke, and John Thelwall of December 1794, it really looked as though the Government was determined to ruin or exile every liberal dissenter in England. Rather than suffer persecution, many of them considered emigrating and sent representatives to investigate the possibilities of the United States as a political asylum. Joseph Priestley Jr. and Thomas Cooper, as the representatives of a group of Birmingham and Manchester dissenters, decided on Northern Pennsylvania as a place of asylum and Cooper wrote a book, *Some Information Respecting America* (London, 1794) to support that decision. It is hard to separate the sincerity, practicality, and cupidity in Cooper's account. The United States was recommended as a refuge because of its constitutional protections of freedom of speech and religion. Northern Pennsylvania was the choice because its climate was healthier than coastal regions, its winters less severe than New England's, its summers less oppressive than those of the South. There was no slavery there, its settlers were already predominantly English, and large, contiguous sections

⁶ For the complete story of this plan, see the excellent paper by Mary Cathryne Park, "Joseph Priestley and the Problem of Pantisocracy," *Proceedings of the Delaware County Institute of Science*, 10 (1947), 1-60.

of land could be purchased cheaply, which would increase in value as a settlement was established. Nothing was said about the rigors of frontier life, about the limitations of opportunity, or about the dearth of cultural advantage. More significantly, nothing was said about the fact that Priestley Jr., Cooper, and their friends had already begun to lease the available land in the region. The Priestley group began its large scale speculative purchases several months before Dr. Priestley sailed and continued them through 1796. When their leasing had ended, members of the group controlled nearly 700,000 acres of land in the Loyalsock region, forming a rough isoceles triangle based on the north branch of the Susquehanna, pointing south-east to what is now Williamsport.

The speculation was a failure; the colony failed to develop and the leases expired or were resold. Only the name New Era and the Asylum Monument remain in the area as signs of the plans once held for the region. Reminders of the scheme are to be found only in scattered passages of Priestley's *Memoirs*, in Priestley Jr.'s unpublished correspondence, and in references to Pantisocracy in the lives of Southey and Coleridge, references seldom traced to their source by literary historians. The plan to establish the colony failed as war with France discouraged an emigration that the acquittal of Hardy, Tooke, and Thelwall made less pressing; and as political repression in the United States, culminating in the Alien and Sedition Acts of 1798, made this country a less desirable haven. It is well that the plan did fail. Priestley Jr. wrote:

Fortunately for the original proposers, the scheme was abandoned. It might and would have answered in a pecuniary point of view, as the land now sells at double and treble the price then asked for it, without the advantages which that settlement would have given rise to; but the generality of Englishmen come to this country with such erroneous ideas, and unless previously accustomed to a life of labour, are so ill qualified to commence cultivation in a wilderness, that the projectors would most probably have been

subject to still more unfounded abuse than they have been, for their well-meant endeavours to promote the interests of their countrymen.⁷

This might well be taken as a classic example of British understatement. The candidates for the colony were generally middle-class, educated British lawyers, teachers, preachers, and businessmen—or worse. Southey and Coleridge seem to have thought of the Pennsylvania wilderness as a place to work for four hours a day, spending the remainder of their time in poetic raptures and philosophy. When William Russell, merchant of Birmingham, saw the land he had purchased, he retreated in dismay to the cultural amenities of coastal Connecticut and finally returned to England. The Rev. William Christie joined the Priestleys in Northumberland in 1795, but moved to a Philadelphia Church shortly after Dr. Priestley's death. Dr. Henry Toulmin became successively President of Transylvania, Kentucky Secretary of State, and Federal Judge of Alabama; Benjamin and John Vaughan settled as merchants in Maine and Philadelphia. Thomas Cooper was to be a judge, professor, and college president, but never a farmer. Even Joseph Priestley Jr., after being a storekeeper and landlord in Northumberland, returned ultimately to England and a career in industrial management. The emigrants of the Priestley group who remained in the United States succeeded, but only because there were few enough of them to profit from Thomas Jefferson's friendship. An entire colony of them must have failed had it started, for frontier America needed farmers not merchants, carpenters not poets, and blacksmiths not ministers or lawyers.

The collapse of the colonization scheme left Priestley without assured foundations for either the church or the school he had hoped to establish, but he was not prepared to give up his beloved projects. The establishment of a Unitarian Church could,

⁷ *Memoirs of Dr. Joseph Priestley* (London, J. Johnson, 1806), vol. 1, pp. 166-7.

in a sense, be a consequence of the individual effort of a minister—and Priestley held religious classes, read prayers, and occasionally preached, until he had formed a small religious society which might be called the remote origin of the present Priestley Memorial Unitarian Church in Northumberland. The school Priestley had in mind was a different proposition. While the settlement scheme was still on, Priestley had no doubts as to the necessity of a school in the region. In his earliest educational treatise—and first polemical tract—of 1765, Priestley had asked:

What . . . can be more justly alarming to a man who has a true taste for happiness than . . . that . . . the education of his children should be under the direction of persons who have no particular knowledge of him, or particular affection for him, and whose views and maxims he might utterly dislike?⁸

This eventuality Priestley was determined to forestall, and with a school which would be more than an elementary or secondary school. He wanted an Academy, modelled after the dissenting academies of England, which could provide a college education. Priestley had taught at two such academies, Warrington and Hackney, where his experiences had shown him the problems of educational institutions perpetually struggling against inadequate backing with niggardly funds. He had learned the necessity of broad support for such establishments and had hardly landed in the United States than he began to search out such support. He wrote to Benjamin Rush, in November 1794, “. . . hoping we shall succeed in establishing a College in this place,” and again in November declaring that he waited “. . . for the opportunity of being of use to the College which I hope will be established here.” In January 1795 he wrote to John Vaughan, “I hope you will not be unmindful of the business of the College that we talked of for this place. If this can be established, Mr. Toulmin from Kentucky might join us, and other tutors might come

⁸ Joseph Priestley, *An Essay on a Course of Liberal Education*, &c. (London, 1765), pp. 153-4.

from England." Priestley began to solicit subscriptions for the proposed Northumberland Academy and was, at first, successful. He wrote to Rush in May 1795, "We are much obliged to you for the pains you have taken about our *Academy*. As the situation is not unfavorable, I hope it will succeed." And to Vaughan, he wrote in August, "My son will talk to you about the visit I propose to pay you, and the *College* about which I suppose nothing can be done till the buildings are erected next year." He even began to boast a little to his friends in England, writing to William Withering of Birmingham, in October, "Soon, however, I expect to be employed in the instruction of youth, as a *college* is to be established in this place, and I am appointed the principal. The next spring we begin to build, but our funds will be small."⁹

At about this time, opposition to Northumberland Academy, or to Priestley, or both began to be felt. There was early evidence of the lines such opposition might take, in President Nisbet's comment of October 1794, ". . . if he should attempt to set up an academy, to teach French Liberty & Equality, & the Dominion of the Sovereign People, he would effectively ruin this Seminary, as a French Citizen would be preferred to any one else . . ." ¹⁰ If Nisbet knew of Rush's correspondence with Priestley, he might well have feared for the security of Dickinson. Before he was estranged by political disagreements with Nisbet, Rush had been the driving force behind the establishment of Dickinson College. Now he was seldom concerning himself with Dickinson affairs and had sent his own sons to Princeton. But the Northumberland region contained a community of ignorant whiskey-drinking, republican Scotch-Irish settlers similar to that which had earlier impelled Rush to establish a college at Carlisle; could he now be induced by Priestley to help start another at Northumberland?

⁹The most extensive treatment of Northumberland Academy is in Joseph Samuel Hepburn, "Pennsylvania Association of Joseph Priestley, Part II. Northumberland Academy," *Journal of the Franklin Institute*, 244 (1947), 95-103.

¹⁰Nisbet to Buchan, see *supra*, footnote 1.

If Nisbet could have read Rush's correspondence with John Dickinson, he might have been still more concerned. Priestley, wrote Rush in April 1796, ". . . expressed a desire to be acquainted with you. I have promised him that pleasure, the next time he visits Wilmington. Upon all subjects (two or three in divinity excepted) you will harmonize with him. I have never met with so much knowledge, accompanied with so much simplicity of manners. You will be charmed with him."¹¹ Were Rush and Priestley enlisting the support of another of Dickinson's founders for Northumberland Academy? True, John Dickinson had not supported the college of his name for years—but that would make his support of another college still more embarrassing.

Had fear for the security of Dickinson College been the source of Nisbet's dislike for Priestley, he could soon have relaxed. The errant impulse that had stirred Rush to establish colleges (Dickinson in 1783 and Franklin in 1787) had passed. Though Rush may have given advice to Priestley on the establishment of Northumberland Academy, that was all he gave. His subscriptions to Northumberland, when that institution needed cash, were instead the cancelling of a payment due on lands the Priestleys had bought from him. Rush's collegiate affections might be a little fickle, but his fondness for that "beloved petulant brat" of his in Carlisle remained strong. As for John Dickinson, there is no evidence that Priestley did, in fact, meet him and if he had, nothing to suggest that Dickinson would have contributed to the support of a Unitarian College. Nisbet's real alarm, like that of other Federalists in the country, was over Priestley's politics. In October 1798, Nisbet went so far as to express his disgust that Priestley had not been arrested as a French agent. "But as our Government is weak and has no Army to enforce its orders, No notice has been taken of the Matter, for fear of rais-

¹¹ "[Benjamin Rush,] Four Letters addressed to John Dickinson," *Pennsylvania Magazine* 29 (1905), 227.

ing an Insurrection among the People.”¹² Nisbet was not alone in seeing Priestley as a Jacobin come to lead the French Revolution every Federalist foresaw in every expression of political dissatisfaction. If Dickinson students defiantly refused to note Nisbet’s diatribes against republicans, there were many more important persons who registered agreement. Unfortunately for Priestley, these were the people with money, who might have been brought to support his college. Failure of the settlement scheme meant that support for Northumberland Academy must come from native sources. The majority of people in the back country were republican, but they had little money, felt no need for higher education, and were incensed with Priestley’s unorthodoxy. The people of Priestley’s own middle-class, less bigoted theologically and more likely to support an educational institution were the Federalists who came most to distrust Priestley’s politics.

It was perhaps inevitable that there be a political reaction in the United States and that Priestley be caught in it. It never occurred to him that he could be reviled in America for unorthodox religion or belief in the rights of man. In common with his fellows of the Enlightenment, Priestley suffered from that fault, of all faults most excuseable in a humanist and scholar, of believing in the rationalism of mankind. Liberals in England truly believed that good laws could end prejudice and reason become the basis of man’s behavior. In the vision of Samuel Taylor Coleridge, after Priestley, “patriot, and saint, and sage” was driven from his native land by “statesmen, blood-stain’d, and priests, idolatrous,” he pitying, retired, and “mused expectant on these promised years.”¹³ But Priestley was to find those years promised for calm musings were to be some time in coming. He

¹² Letter of Charles Nisbet to Charles Wallace, 25 October 1798, Manuscript Division, New York Public Library.

¹³ S. T. Coleridge, *Poems on Various Subjects* (London, 1796), pp. 164-165.

had been warned. The Rev. James Freeman of Boston had written to Theophilus Lindsey, in June 1793:

... bigotry is not yet extinct among us. Though it reflects disgrace upon some of my fellow citizens, I mention it freely because it gives me an opportunity of observing what I believe is not much attended to [in] England, that the people in America are much less liberal and enlightened than is generally imagined. . . . it must be confessed that there are men who are disposed to persecute, and that they do actually persecute, as far as they can, with uncharitable censures. I have learned from various quarters that some liberal dissenters of England are migrating to this country. . . . I wish they may not be disappointed in their expectations. They will hope to find us as little subject to the dominion of prejudice as we are to the tyranny of arbitrary laws. But they will soon be convinced that ignorance and bigotry are not confined to England.¹⁴

But Freeman could not have foreseen that a talented and unprincipled journalist would make his living by violent public attacks on Priestley. English admirers of William Cobbett's later career as a democratic reformer tend to ignore his American career as "Peter Porcupine," for how could they explain his violent support of an English constitution he was later so violently to attack. Yet Peter Porcupine probably did more to marshal conservative public opinion against Priestley than any other man. Less and less were the moneyed men of America inclined to assist Northumberland Academy and, when financial distress was added to suspicion, subscribers defaulted on their promises. Priestley wrote to Thomas Belsham in May 1797, "If our college goes on, I shall want them [your lectures]. But several of our principal subscribers have suffered by the late speculations, so that, for the present, things are at a stand with respect to it."¹⁵ By September he was again optimistic, writing to Lindsey:

Yesterday there was a meeting of the Committee of our College

¹⁴ James Freeman to Rev. Mr. Lindsey, 16 June 1793, Manuscript Collection, Dr. William's Library, London.

¹⁵ J. Priestley to T. Belsham, 29 May 1797, Dr. William's Library.

or rather Academy (for by that title it is incorporated,) when it was determined to open the lectures on the first of April next, & to hire a house, till the building be raised. I was glad to see so much spirit in the friends of this institution, after our chief supports had failed, from the distress which affects almost all our mercantile people. We must apply for assistance to the legislature, & have little doubt of obtaining something handsome.¹⁶

The appeal to the legislature did not succeed. Priestley wrote, in May 1799:

Here the States have refused to grant anything to our college in this town. The walls are raised, and so, I believe, it will remain. I suspect politics have their influence here. I think to resign my presidentship of it. The two houses are strongly on the side of government. At the last session the House of Assembly voted us \$3,000, but the Upper House put their negative. I proposed to do the duty without any salary. I am afraid, however, that the objection is not to me, but to the encouragement of seminaries of learning in general.¹⁷

Priestley's suspicion of political influence was correct, but his fear for seminaries in general was not. Dickinson College, with its Federalist president, received a grant of \$3,000 from the legislative session of 1798 which denied the grant to Northumberland. It was institutions unfriendly to the government which were not to be encouraged. President Adams, whose support of the Alien and Sedition Acts was but one of the blots on his career, wrote to his secretary-of-state, "I really begin to think, or rather suspect, that learned academies, not under the immediate inspection and control of government, have disorganized the world, and are incompatible with social order."¹⁸ Tempers grew so heated during the last years of the Adams administration, that Priestley felt compelled to publish *Letters to the Inhabitants of Northumberland and its Neighbourhood* (Northumberland, 1799), defending himself against the slander of Federalists. In the second

¹⁶ J. Priestley to T. Lindsey, 14 September 1797, Dr. William's Library.

¹⁷ J. Priestley to T. Lindsey, 3 May 1799, Dr. William's Library.

¹⁸ John Adams to T. Pickering, 16 September 1798, quoted in James Morton Smith, *Freedom's Fetters* (Ithaca, 1956), p. 171.

edition of 1801, he had also to explain about Northumberland Academy:

. . . after five years of efforts on the part of the friends of this institution, nothing has hitherto been done beyond the erection of a shell of a building, the expence of which is not yet defrayed; and it does not appear probable that my services will be called for while I shall be capable of giving them.¹⁹

However, with the election of Jefferson, political favor shone on Priestley at long last. For the first time in his memory, the head of the government under which he lived was actually friendly. Under these new circumstances, a more successful appeal for aid went to the Pennsylvania State Legislature. The appeal, made in 1803 and approved January 20, 1804, resulted in a direct grant to Northumberland Academy of \$2,000, out of arrears of state taxes due from the county of Northumberland, and a conditional award of not more than \$3,000, contingent on the valuation of Priestley's library when it was given to the Academy. The award was too late for Priestley. When he died, February 4th, he could hardly more than have heard of it, but, with the promise of state aid, Northumberland Academy was opened for classes under the direction of Priestley's friend, the Rev. William Christie. When Christie left for Philadelphia in 1806, he was succeeded by the Rev. Isaac Grier, a graduate of Dickinson, and Isaac Grier was succeeded, at his death in 1815, by Robert C. Grier, Isaac's son, also a graduate of Dickinson and later to become Associate Justice of the U.S. Supreme Court. Grier was followed, in succession, by the Rev. Robert F. N. Smith, the Rev. Elijah D. Plumb, and the Rev. Robert Elliot. The Academy was not open continuously, nor did it ever develop a college curriculum. Without Priestley's interest, the Academy struggled haltingly for years, never quite closing and never quite out of financial difficulties. In

¹⁹ J. Priestley, *Letters to the Inhabitants of Northumberland* (Northumberland, 1801), p. 92.

1808, the trustees made a further appeal for aid from the State. On the condition that they release the State from all previous claims, the Assembly granted Northumberland \$2,000—which, this time, it actually received. It develops that Northumberland had obtained only \$430 of the earlier “grant” of \$2,000 and none of the \$3,000 conditional on receiving Priestley’s books.

Priestley’s library had gone to the trustees of Northumberland Academy at his death in 1804. At that time, its 4,000 volumes would have formed a substantial college library. In 1800, of Harvard, William and Mary, Yale, Princeton, Pennsylvania, Columbia, Brown, Dartmouth, Union College, and Dickinson; only Harvard had in excess of 4,000 books in its library.²⁰ But the books were hardly suitable for a high school. In 1816, finally despairing of any collegiate development at Northumberland, and the academy being once again in financial distress, the library was sold. The over 4,000 volumes of classics, theology, medicine, natural history, and science sold for approximately \$4,000, which went to the Academy as a final shot in the arm.²¹ The sacrifice was in vain. Although classes were being given at Northumberland Academy as late as 1827, by 1844 the school had finally closed, its building was being used as a mill and dwelling. The property dragged on under the control of the remaining trustees until 1864, when it was conveyed to the directors of Borough public schools in Northumberland. There is little evidence of curricula and none of students enrolled at Northumberland Academy during its less than forty years of existence. Its memory has almost vanished and its sole claim to fame, besides its connection with Priestley, is that Justice Robert Grier earned his living there while he studied law. Again we have traced an essay in futility.

Fortunately, the success of a teacher cannot be measured by

²⁰ Theodore Horberger, *Scientific Thought in the American Colleges, 1638-1800* (Austin, 1945), pp. 7-14.

²¹ *Notes and Queries*, 4th Ser., 3 (1869), 64.

his skill in organizing nor his ease in organization. To the considerable distress of administrators, no sure way of determining the importance of a teacher has yet been found and the nebulousities of personal influence, the indirect statistics of book usage, remain the only standard. Measured on this scale, Priestley was a successful teacher in America, for all his obvious failures. Priestley had no direct contact with students in the United States. He had turned down the position at the University of Pennsylvania in 1794, in favor of a school in which he was never to teach. Years earlier, in 1773 before his great reputation as a chemist was made, Franklin and John Winthrop of Harvard had failed to find an American academic post for Priestley. Winthrop wrote:

A man of his abilities would do honor to any of the colleges. At present there is no vacancy among them, but if there were, I believe, Sir, you judge perfectly right, that his religious principles would hardly be thought orthodox enough.²²

His last opportunity for official contact with American students, a suggestion from some of the trustees in 1803, that he might be chosen Provost of the University of Pennsylvania, came too late for him to accept the nomination. But Priestley's personal influence was made manifest through other teachers. His arrival in the United States was, for example, the signal for a three-way debate on chemical theory. Neither his friends, Samuel Latham Mitchill of Columbia and James Woodhouse of Pennsylvania, nor his attacker, John Maclean of Princeton, accepted Priestley's belief in phlogiston, but their discussion offered American students a new opportunity to see chemical theory as it was created, rather than accepting it as it had been brought to them by their teachers from Scotland and France. By the time Thomas Cooper taught chemistry at Dickinson, Pennsylvania, and South Carolina, there could be no question of teaching Priestley's views, but Cooper's introductory lectures on chemistry include a discussion

²² John Winthrop to B. Franklin, 4 March 1773, *The Works of Benjamin Franklin*, ed. Jared Sparks, (Boston, 1838), vol. 6, p. 375.

of chemical history which praises Priestley's work, while his bringing Priestley's apparatus to Dickinson has been a continuing source of inspiration to young scientists.²³

The enthusiasm Cooper roused in anti-Federalists and the hatred roused in Federalists suggests that Cooper injected more than chemistry into his lectures at Dickinson and Pennsylvania. As President and professor of South Carolina College, he is known to have lectured on government, metaphysics, rhetoric, *belles lettres*, and political economy. The texts used for the courses and the sources of the curriculum proposals for Cooper's work at South Carolina are as unknown as those for Henry Toulmin's work as President of Transylvania. But Cooper had been a friend of Priestley for years, shared his library, and wrote appendices to Priestley's *Memoirs* praising his metaphysical and political works; while Toulmin was the son of one of Priestley's great friends in England, was himself a Unitarian minister, was an admirer of Priestley and had been a student at a dissenting academy in which Priestley's books were used as texts. It seems reasonable to suppose, then, that both Cooper and Toulmin made use of Priestley's educational works in their courses. Certainly there were a sufficient number of them, covering so extraordinary a range of subjects, as to make a respectable school library in themselves. Priestley had been one of the first persons to insist that pupils, not intended for the learned professions, needed a liberal education planned for their use. He had recommended this practise in an early work, *An Essay on a Course of Liberal education for civil and active Life* (London, 1765), and repeated his stand in his *Miscellaneous Observations relating to Education* (London, 1780), but in attempting, himself, to carry out these proposals he found it necessary to write the texts for many of the courses he recommended—especially for Civil History, Civil Policy and law. Before he had finished writing texts,

²³ Thomas Cooper, *The Introductory lecture . . . of Chemistry at Carlisle College, &c.* (Carlisle, 1812).

in addition to his histories of electricity and of optics, which were primarily educational in intent, he had published time-line charts of history and biography, the *Rudiments of English Grammar*, *Heads of Lectures on a Course of Experimental Philosophy*, lectures on oratory and criticism, on language and universal grammar, and on History and General Policy, introductions to the study of electricity and of perspective, and *An Essay on the First Principles of Government*. Most of these works went through many editions in England, and the historical and biographical charts, the *Lectures on History and General Policy*, and the *Essay on a course of Liberal Education* were reprinted in the United States.

Not only were these books printed, they were also used in American schools and colleges. Samuel Miller's extraordinary *Brief Retrospect of the Eighteenth Century*, published in 1803, recommends Priestley's history and biography charts for use in schools. By 1830, Harvard College Library contained copies of almost every work Priestley ever wrote, and many in several editions.²⁴ As early as 1788, Priestley's *Lectures on History* were recommended to the President of Rhode Island College (Brown University) and a copy was sent from England for the college library.²⁵ These *Lectures on History* were also used as the history text at Yale between 1790 and 1800,²⁶ while G. W. P. Custis reported to his step-father, George Washington, in 1797, that he was studying Priestley's lectures on History, under the direction of President Smith of Princeton.²⁷

Perhaps the greatest impact of Priestley's ideas on education was that made on Thomas Jefferson. In 1800, Jefferson sent

²⁴ *Catalogue of the Harvard College Library* (Cambridge, 1830).

²⁵ Reuben Aldridge Guild, *Life, Times and Correspondence of James Manning* (Boston, 1864), p. 414.

²⁶ Lewis Franklin Snow, *The College Curriculum in the United States* (New York, 1907), p. 91.

²⁷ "Letters of G. W. P. Custis to George Washington, 1797-1798," *Virginia Magazine of History* 20 (1912), 299-302.

copies of some books by Priestley to the Bishop James Madison, President of William and Mary, and received, in return, Madison's particular thanks.²⁸ By 1816, William and Mary had a new president, to whom Jefferson strongly recommended Priestley's *Essays on the First Principles of Government* as a text. Still more important was Jefferson's use of Priestley's ideas in planning his University of Virginia. In 1800 Jefferson wrote to Priestley asking for advice on establishing a college on a liberal basis. Most of Priestley's curriculum ideas had been published, but he repeated these in substance and added his advice on the more practical problems of administration. Although the initial distribution of courses among a limited professorial staff at the University of Virginia bears some resemblance to the plan suggested by Priestley, so many years had elapsed between Priestley's letter of advice and the establishment of the University, years during which Jefferson had also queried many other persons, including Thomas Cooper, that it is not possible to claim Priestley's letter had influenced this distribution.

Indeed, it is impossible to say how much Priestley's particular suggestions aided Jefferson in any of his planning. Two of Priestley's recommendations have, however, been a source of continuing inspiration to students and college administrators. ". . . a large and well chosen library will be of great use," wrote Priestley. "Not that the students should be encouraged to read books while they are under tuition, but an opportunity of seeing books, and looking into them, will give them a better idea of the value of them . . ." Priestley also wrote, "In order to engage able professors, some fixed salaries are necessary, but they should not be much more than a bare subsistence. They will then have a motive to exert themselves, and by the fees of students their emoluments may be ample."²⁹ Who would have suspected that students' re-

²⁸ "Letters of Rev. James Madison . . . to Thomas Jefferson," *William and Mary College Quarterly* 5 (second series, 1925), pp. 147-149.

²⁹ J. Priestley to Thomas Jefferson, 8 May 1800 and "Hints concerning Public Education," Jefferson Papers, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress.

fusal to read and administrators' to pay had so respectable an origin?

A more explicit indication of Priestley's influence on Jefferson's educational ideas is to be found in Jefferson's recommendations for the study of law and of history. In 1814 Jefferson recommended a course of reading for a law student; most of the works on English history and biography are those recommended in Priestley's *Lectures on History and Description of a Chart of Biography*. In 1825 Jefferson wrote to a member of the faculty of the University of Virginia suggesting authors and methods for the teaching of history. He might as well have sent his correspondent Priestley's *Lectures on History*. The authors recommended, the order followed, the reasons given, and almost the language used in Jefferson's letter can be found in Priestley's book.³⁰

To Priestley, exile in the United States was the culmination of catastrophe; America represented the end of his life of usefulness. In a sense, he was right. Because he settled in Northumberland, his American years were spent in comparative isolation and his continuing work in science and theology suffered from lack of equipment, intellectual stimulation, and informed criticism. But it is hard to believe that he would have achieved much more had he settled in Philadelphia—or indeed remained in England. He was sixty years old when he sailed for the United States; under any circumstances his last years would have been contemplative rather than creative. It is possible, indeed, to see in his move to the United States, a final extension of his influence which would have been impossible in England. Chemistry had already taken a path he was unable to change and unwilling to follow. His political ideas had already achieved their ultimate success when they were answered by force instead of argument. His theology had already stirred the minds of men able to lead his

³⁰ R. J. Honeywell, *The Educational Work of Thomas Jefferson*, vol. 16 of *Harvard Studies in Education* (Cambridge, 1931), pp. 121, 172-173.

church in more spiritually satisfying directions. In education alone had his work been inadequately developed—and such a development was impossible in an England where dissenting academies were closing under conflict of doctrine and higher education was limited to two Universities bemused with the past. Only in the United States, burgeoning with colleges, could his ideas in education have received the trial that they did and only there could his influence have spread so far. Some of this might have occurred without Priestley's physical presence in the country, though the amount that took place because of his presence and after he arrived is significant. Probably Priestley will always best be known for his scientific work, then for his theology and his politics. But Priestley's contributions to American education should not be forgotten. It is no small achievement to have inspired the teachers, influenced the curricula, or supplied the textbooks for Dickinson, Harvard, Brown, Princeton, Pennsylvania, Columbia, Transylvania, South Carolina, and Virginia.³¹

³¹ I have also referred freely to the published Spahr Lectures for 1947-1950, *Bulwark of Liberty* and for 1951-1956, *John and Mary's College* (Carlisle, 1950, 1956), to Walter Wilson Jennings, *Transylvania, Pioneer University of the West* (New York, 1955), Edwin L. Green, *A History of the University of South Carolina* (Columbia, S. C., 1916), and to various biographical dictionaries.

ROBERT COLEMAN: *From*
IMMIGRANT OPPORTUNIST *to*
MILLIONAIRE IRONMASTER

FREDERIC SHRIVER KLEIN

February 6, 1959

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Professor of History at Franklin and Marshall College, and since 1928 a member of the faculty there, Professor Klein holds a long-established position of authority in the field of Pennsylvania and Maryland history. It is supported by articles in PENNSYLVANIA HISTORY, the MARYLAND HISTORICAL MAGAZINE, AMERICAN HERITAGE, and other journals. He is the author also of RESEARCH METHODS IN HISTORY, 1931, THE SPIRITUAL AND EDUCATIONAL BACKGROUND OF FRANKLIN AND MARSHALL COLLEGE, 1939, and LANCASTER COUNTY, 1841-1941, a social and economic history of that region of which a revised edition has recently appeared. He is at present Chairman of the Lancaster County Civil War Centennial Committee, and is conducting a series of television programs in connection with this observance. During World War II, Professor Klein was in charge of the aviation training unit at Franklin and Marshall College, and was President of the National Association of Colleges in Pilot Training. He was also Commander of Squadron 304, Civil Air Patrol, and holds the rank of Major.

ROBERT COLEMAN: *From* IMMIGRANT OPPORTUNIST *to* MILLIONAIRE IRONMASTER

THERE has always been something fascinating about people who have become millionaires. For more than a century, the acquisition of great wealth has been a significant part of what is usually called the American Dream, which has been memorialized by Horatio Alger, typified by Carnegie and Vanderbilt and Rockefeller, and denounced by socialists who cannot understand how one person can have so much when so many have so little.

Sometimes the process of becoming a millionaire is considered to be merely a matter of luck, like the magic touch of the sparkling wand of the Goddess of Fortune; sometimes it is believed to be an undeserved or unjust freak of Fate, which must always be accompanied by some unpleasant compensating factors, such as permanent affliction with the gout, or having a sword of Damocles dangling overhead like a ubiquitous mobile; and more frequently we may reluctantly admit that the million dollars may have resulted from long and dull hours of energetic work, always accompanied by driving ambition and the vision to recognize an opportunity and to take advantage of it.

Robert Coleman was probably Pennsylvania's first millionaire.

He was also a trustee of Dickinson College, which established a relationship which might appropriately be called the American College President's Dream. It should be interesting to explore the particular chain of circumstances which led an immigrant boy from Ireland to become a millionaire, and which led a millionaire to Dickinson College, in the hope that all immigrants and all college Presidents may profit from the lessons of history.

Coleman was well-known in post-Revolutionary Pennsylvania, but his career has been submerged by the rushing stream of history during the past century and a half. Since, after all, history is simply a composite of the experiences and actions of individual human beings, the story of Robert Coleman should lead us to a better understanding of an era which is now long past, but still fundamental in our American heritage.

Robert Coleman's native land was Ireland, and his place of birth was known as CastleFinn, near Strabane in County Donegal, not far from the ancestral home of James Buchanan. He was more English than Irish, for his family had been persuaded to leave England and take up lands in Ireland by Charles I. His father, Thomas, was married twice, with a family of two sons from his first marriage and six daughters by his second marriage. Robert was born on November 4, 1748. Perhaps this was too large a family for father Thomas, but in any case, a brother-in-law, who was an Anglican clergyman, persuaded the two boys to consider emigration to the new world. Brother William took passage to Canada, and a short time afterwards, in 1764, Robert Coleman, at the age of sixteen, took the long passage to Philadelphia.¹

A generation before, another teen-age boy named Benjamin Franklin had arrived on these same Philadelphia streets, but Coleman had a slightly better start. Franklin had only one Dutch dollar in his pockets, but Bob Coleman had three guineas and

¹ J. L. Delafield, *Notes*, in *Pa. Mag. of Hist. and Biog.*, XXXVI, (1912), 226.

two letters of introduction. Friends in England had supplied him with a note to Mark Biddle, a Philadelphia merchant, and friends in Ireland had directed him to Blair McClenahan, banker, merchant and politician.

For a few months he was employed in Biddle's store, where it became apparent that he could write very neatly and legibly. When it was learned that Mr. Read, the prothonotary in Reading, needed a clerk, young Bob Coleman was recommended.² There he worked copying wills, legal records, mortgages, deeds and agreements for two years, acquiring useful first-hand knowledge of the complications and devices for owning and transferring property.

Then, at nearby Hopewell Forge, Curtis and Peter Grubb, two of Pennsylvania's most famous ironmasters, needed a book-keeper, and, having seen some of Coleman's careful attention to legal details and having witnessed his precise work, employed him at one hundred pounds per year at Hopewell.³ This was in 1766, he was now eighteen years old, and this was his first experience with the iron industry.

As he kept the records of the eighteenth century charcoal iron furnace, he learned much about the routine of the ironmaster's business. He recorded the names and hours of the charcoal-burners, who lived in huts in the Furnace Hills, cutting and charring huge heaps of wood. He listed the wagons and wagoners who brought the charcoal and ore and limestone to the furnace. He learned that it took almost an acre of woodland every day to produce the charcoal for two tons of iron daily. He learned that mining in Pennsylvania required no special skill, since most of the ore deposits lay on the surface and could be quarried without excavation or tunnelling or shafts.⁴ He learned how a simple charcoal blast furnace could be built against the

² Henry C. Grittinger, *Cornwall Furnace*, in Lebanon Co. Hist. Soc. Pubs., II, No. 1 (1901), 23.

³ Delafield, *op. cit.*, 227.

⁴ John David Schoepf, *Travels in the Confederation*, (Balto., 1911), I, 208.

side of a hill, so that the charge could be placed in at the top, and the molten iron drawn off at the bottom. He found that the location of a furnace depended mostly on ore deposits, wood and water power to drive the huge bellows for the air blast. He learned the difference between a furnace which produced pig-iron and castings, and a forge, which hammered masses of hot iron into iron bars. Above all, as he kept his books, he learned that relatively small amounts of cash were needed for the ironmaster's enterprise—hours of labor credited to the workmen everyday were often balanced by commodities purchased at the ironmaster's store; supplies and equipment needed on the manor were often balanced by shipments of pig-iron or bar-iron or cast-iron products to merchants in Philadelphia. Extension of long-term credits was common to the business. The most essential attributes seemed to be plenty of woodland near the orefields, and an understanding of the complex relationships which made the ironmaster's manor a self-supporting community. To have learned all this at the age of eighteen gave Coleman a good start.

Coleman spent about six months at Hopewell, and then went to work for a new employer, an event which was to have great influence on his coming career. He took a position as a clerk at Quittapahilla Forge, later known as New Market Forge, under James Old, another of Pennsylvania's great ironmasters.⁵ Perhaps they had met before, when Coleman was a young clerk in Biddle's Philadelphia store, but it seems evident that James Old was impressed by the young man's appearance and his qualifications as a careful book-keeper and clerk. Coleman lived with his employer's family, moving from time to time to Speedwell Forge and to Reading Furnace in Chester County.

Having accomplished his first two steps on the road to success—beautiful and legible penmanship and a knowledge of the inner workings of industrial finance, Coleman now took his third

⁵ Arthur C. Bining, *Pennsylvania Iron Manufacture in the Eighteenth Century*, (Harrisburg, 1938), 132.

step, and one which all would-be millionaires would do well to consider. After three years in James Old's employ, he married his employer's lovely daughter, Ann Old, on October 4, 1773, at Reading Furnace. This was the end of his career as an employee, and the beginning of his experience as an ironmaster, for in the same year he leased Salford Furnace, near Norristown, for a term of three years. He now had his own iron furnace, a wealthy ironmaster for a father-in-law, a charming bride, and a Revolutionary War coming up in the near future, as ingredients for his success formula.

About the time that this twenty-five year old ironmaster was beginning his married life, a middle-aged German named Henry William Stiegel was being sent to a debtor's prison in Philadelphia. Since it was through Stiegel's Elizabeth Furnace estate near Manheim that Coleman was to become connected with the vast property holdings which he later acquired, we should pay some attention to Stiegel's career and his problems.

There are some interesting similarities and some dramatic contrasts between these two men. Stiegel had begun his employment as a young immigrant, working as clerk and book-keeper for ironmaster Jacob Huber, at Elizabeth Furnace. Ironmaster Huber had an eighteen-year old daughter named Elizabeth, and Henry Stiegel promptly married his employer's daughter the first year he worked for Huber. To this stage, his career began very much like that of Coleman.

In 1758, ironmaster Huber's modest enterprise of 400 acres was bought by a partnership including Stiegel and the Stedmans of Philadelphia, forming an ambitious group which in the next two years increased the 400 acres to 10,454.⁶ Stiegel seems to have been bubbling over with enthusiasm, for within a few years he had expanded his activities at a tremendous rate. He bought the 88-acre Charming Forge estate and expanded it to 3,100

⁶ George L. Heiges, *Henry William Stiegel* (Lancaster, 1948), 31.

acres.⁷ Instead of confining his furnaces to the casting of pigs, he began to cast a wide variety of cannon stoves, six and ten plate stoves, kettles and plates for jamb stoves. He laid out and built the town of Manheim, rebuilt Elizabeth Furnace, and erected a handsome stone mansion for himself, surrounded by stone houses for the workmen, and with all the shops and appurtenances belonging to an iron community manor. Here was where he dreamed his dreams of really becoming a baron in America. Here was where tradition still maintains that his Manheim mansion boasted an orchestra on the rooftop to greet his arrival, or that the boom of a cannon announced that the patron was in residence, or was departing in the magnificent coach that contributed to his fictitious title of "Baron" Stiegel. But no matter what Stiegel may have dreamed, he could not have imagined that he was really building all this for young Robert Coleman, at this time a ten-year old boy in Ireland.

About the time that young Coleman was arriving in Philadelphia, Stiegel was branching out into a new venture and the Stiegel Glass Manufactory was built in a flurry of enthusiastic excitement. However, the uncertain business conditions of the 1760's did not bring in the anticipated profits from glass manufacturing, and Stiegel's debts grew at an alarming rate. The Stedmans, justifiably alarmed by the growth of Revolutionary activity and the financial uncertainties of their enterprise, abandoned the partnership.⁸ Stiegel, obsessed with the future potentialities of the glass industry, mortgaged much of his share of the iron industry to promote his new and more fascinating project.

Now another person becomes involved in the iron industry, to become the third member of an Elizabeth Furnace trio, and in much the same way that Stiegel and Coleman became involved—through a marriage. John Dickinson comes upon the scene, first as a close friend of Isaac Norris, Speaker of the Pennsylvania

⁷ Ibid., 39.

⁸ The Stedmans were arrested as Tories in 1777. Col. Rec., XI, 284.

Assembly, whose political views were identical with those of Dickinson. Dickinson was a frequent and welcome visitor to Fairhill, the magnificent colonial estate of the Norris's. When Norris died in 1766, he left his estate to his two daughters. The Stedman's one-third interest in Elizabeth Furnace was mortgaged to these two daughters, and after the death of one daughter, her elder sister Mary inherited the Elizabeth Furnace property. John Dickinson married Mary Norris in the same year, on July 19, 1770.⁹

So Stiegel, Coleman and Dickinson had all married wives who brought them furnaces as dowries. The circumstances by which this triumvirate of astute young husbands became associated is something like the complicated marriage relationship of the House of Hapsburg, by which an empire was held together for centuries. This practise of uniting iron furnace enterprises by a maze of marriages was a common characteristic of eighteenth and nineteenth century life. It produced a sort of feudal empire, which combined capital, preserved property holdings in the event of the death of a partner or associate, and enabled vast estates to remain in the family and to grow as the families grew. Undoubtedly it helped to keep the families together, and was almost as efficient as the modern corporation. At any rate, every family reunion was a director's meeting. It also led to some of the most complicated litigation in legal history, when estates had to be divided or settled. It is almost impossible to trace some of these complex relationships, but they can be illustrated by one brief venture into genealogical explanation: Robert Coleman married Ann Old, daughter of ironmaster James Old; Cyrus Jacobs, also a clerk, married Old's other daughter Margaret, and also became an ironmaster; a son of James Old married Stiegel's daughter; a grandson of James Old married Rebecca Ege, daughter of Stiegel's nephew and owner of Charming Forge. It

⁹ Charles J. Stillé, *Life and Writings of John Dickinson*, (Phila., 1891), I, 313.

can easily be seen how a relationship like this could unite as many as a dozen forge and furnace operations into a family enterprise.

Thus, through marriages, the glassmaker, the book-keeper and the statesman all became involved in the iron industry. Of the three, Stiegel's relations with his father-in-law were least successful. Elizabeth, his wife, died after a brief marriage of six years, and Stiegel married another Elizabeth the following year, which must have seemed like undue haste to his first father-in-law, who indignantly wrote a will stating: "I give and bequeath to my son-in-law Henry William Stiegel, the sum of one shilling sterling, and I exclude him and his heirs forever from all farther claim to my estate either real or personal."¹⁰

John Dickinson was a leading statesman of Pennsylvania when he acquired his share of Elizabeth Furnace. His "Letters of a Pennsylvania Farmer," published a few years before, had marked him as an eloquent spokesman and acknowledged leader of the conservatives. Stiegel must have looked upon him as an influential patron, whose prestige, political influence and reputation would certainly insure success to a business which was now in precarious condition and burdened with debts. With renewed confidence he expanded his operations even further, and when he found he could not cover his new debts by the sale of his real estate, he asked Dickinson for a loan of two thousand pounds. Dickinson helped him to some extent, and from then on Stiegel fawned on him with eager and persuasive gratitude. For a while Stiegel had hopes that the Pennsylvania legislature would take some official action to promote his American glass factory, but the times were not propitious for new ventures. In 1773, just about the time young Coleman was planning to take unto himself a bride and an iron furnace, Stiegel wrote frantically to Dickinson, "Last night I was informed that the Sheriff hath been at my house and levied all my effects . . . If I obtain no assistance

¹⁰ Lancaster Co. Will Book B, 1, 529.

I shall be in danger of being ruined . . . The satisfaction that will arise in your heart will be great when you reflect that by assisting a man struggling with difficulties and one who is doing all in his power to pay his debts with the strictest honor, you may prevent the ruin of a family.”¹¹

However, by 1774 Stiegel had been sold out by the sheriff, his glass works was gone, and he had only one property left—Elizabeth Furnace, preserved through the goodwill of creditors John Dickinson and Daniel Benezet. When he was released shortly afterwards, his properties had been sold and he was landless and penniless. The furnace at Elizabeth had shut down, the mansion was empty, and Stiegel simply moved into his former homestead, illegally and unnoticed. The spring of 1775 was too turbulent a period for any of his former associates to pay much attention to where he was or what he was doing.

Now we can return to Robert Coleman, whom we left in 1773 beginning his honeymoon and his first venture as an ironmaster at Salford. He wrote in a brief autobiography, “In the year 1776, possessed of but a small capital and recently married, I took a lease on the Elizabeth Furnace estate for the term of seven years, not anticipating at that time that before the expiration of the lease I should have it in my power to become owner in fee simple of the whole or a greater part of the estate. Success, however, crowned my endeavors.”¹²

Never was a simple truth more modestly stated, for Coleman began his career at Elizabeth Furnace at the start of the Revolutionary War, and wars take both blood and iron. At Salford he had learned to cast cannon and shot, and had manufactured great iron chain links to bar the Delaware River against British warships.¹³ At Elizabeth almost the entire output of the furnace was

¹¹ G. L. Heiges, *op. cit.*, 129. Feb. 15, 1773.

¹² J. M. Swank, *Introduction to a History of Ironmaking*, (Phila., 1878), 19; H. C. Grittinger, *Cornwall Furnace*, in *Leb. Co. Hist. Soc. Pubs.*, II, No. 1, pp. 25-26.

¹³ *Penna. Arch.*, 1st Ser., V, 39.

devoted to munitions and war supplies for the Continental Army. Coleman rapidly reorganized the operation of the furnaces which Stiegel had neglected when his interest in glassmaking had developed. He wrote, "A new and regular system was adopted by which the business of the iron works was made to resemble more a well conducted manufactory than the scenes of confusion and disorder which had before prevailed in that business."¹⁴ Stiegel, who had formerly moved about in baronial splendor at Elizabeth Furnace, was glad to see the cold furnace go into blast again, and became clerk and part-time superintendent for Coleman. The ironmaster was now the clerk, and the clerk had become the ironmaster, and here he was to live with his family for thirty years as lord of the iron manor.

The labor problem at the newly leased furnace might have been serious, due to calls for militia service, but the misfortunes of war turned to Coleman's advantage. After the Battle of Trenton on Christmas Eve in 1776, Hessian prisoners were sent to various prisons in Pennsylvania towns, and Coleman was able to secure seventy Germans as laborers at Elizabeth Furnace.¹⁵ Since Congress charged Coleman an average of thirty-odd shillings monthly for each prisoner's labor—much less than the standard pay scale, it was a profitable labor arrangement. Besides, Coleman could pay the Congress with munitions, so that little cash outlay was necessary for their wages. The Hessians, glad to be done with mercenary military service, fitted into the Pennsylvania German community readily, and many of them remained after the war to settle down with American wives. Cannon, shot and salt-pans poured from the furnace instead of stoveplates and kettles. The young ironmaster was doing very well.

Although the ironmasters were carrying out an essential part of the war effort, they were involved in military service as well. On the 4th of July, 1776, a meeting was held at Lancaster to

¹⁴ J. M. Swank, *op. cit.*, 19.

¹⁵ Col. Rec., X, 636; H. C. Grittinger, *op. cit.*, 27.

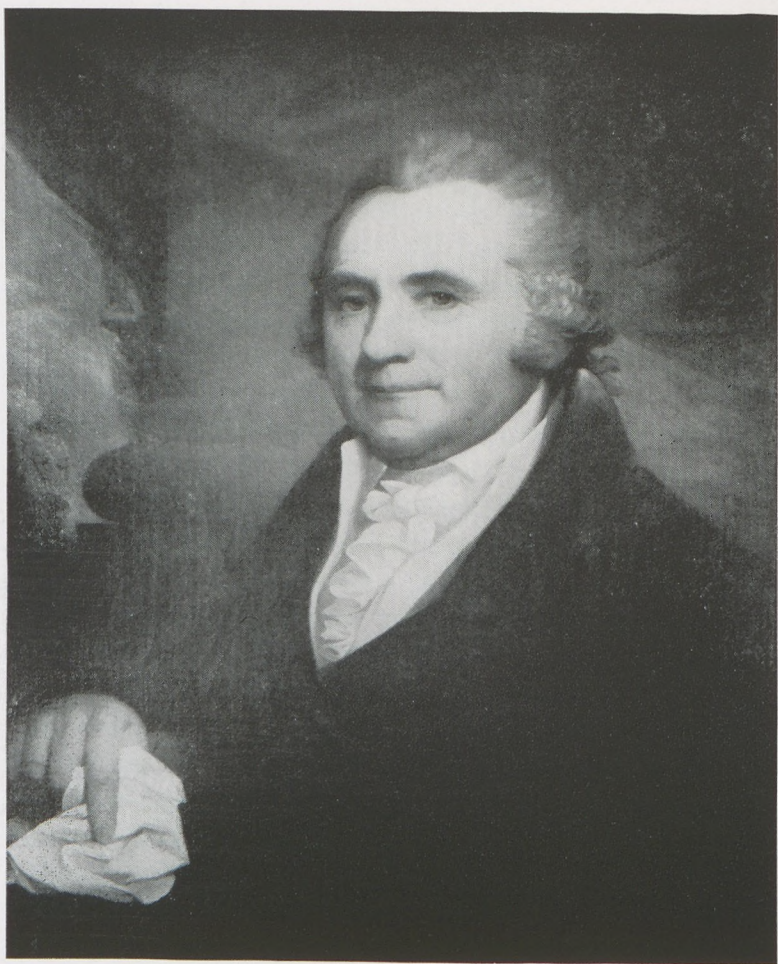


Photo by Fred Holdridge

ROBERT COLEMAN

From the painting by Jacob Eichholtz. Reproduced with the kind permission of the owner, Mrs. G. Dawson Coleman.

organize the Pennsylvania militia into a Flying Camp to march to the defense of New York and New Jersey, and Coleman was commissioned as a 2nd Lieutenant of the 2nd Company of Col. Cunningham's 1st Battalion.¹⁶ The militia was assigned to two month's duty, and marched to New Jersey in August for the Battle of Long Island. It appears that Coleman was called back to the furnace shortly afterwards, for on October 11th, the Pennsylvania Council of Safety "earnestly requested him to lay aside all other business, that he might dispatch the large chain bars which Mr. Peter Brown of this city has bespoke you."¹⁷

Most of the ironmasters were also called for military service, but some of them did not take their obligation too seriously. Both Curtis and Peter Grubb, of Cornwall Furnace, were officers, but Peter Grubb got in some difficulty for collecting advance pay for his battalion and then sending them home instead of marching to New Jersey.¹⁸ On another occasion he was charged officially with having publicly drunk a toast of "Success to King George," to which he replied that he could not remember whether he was drinking to the King's success or to his health, but it was certainly one of them.¹⁹ Some time later he came under suspicion when the French Creek powder factory blew up, since he had been at the powder mill a few days before, somewhat in drink, and had told the Colonel in charge, "Damn the powder mill—let us blow it to hell!" which was thought to be a very odd expression.²⁰ Some of these ironmasters were apparently very rugged individualists.

However, they were a privileged class during the war, and so, fortunately for them, were the ironworkers. Exemptions for persons working in the iron industry became common. On July 31, 1776, the Council of Safety ordered all workers engaged at the

¹⁶ Penna. Arch., 5th Ser., VII, pp. 17-18; 2nd Ser., I, 326.

¹⁷ Penna. Arch., 1st Ser., V, 39.

¹⁸ Penna. Arch., 2nd Ser., XIII, 528.

¹⁹ Peter Force, Am. Arch., 5th Ser., II, 38.

²⁰ Penna. Arch., 1st Ser., V, pp. 255, 257, 258.

iron works in casting cannon or shot not to leave their works or to march with the militia.²¹ Workers at the Grubb Furnace at Cornwall were exempt from militia duty while they were casting salt pans.²² James Old secured exemptions for his workers at Reading Furnace on the grounds that his contracts could not be filled if they were called to duty.²³

Coleman and Stiegel made good use of their Hessian prisoner labor to make one important improvement at Elizabeth Furnace during the war. To insure a constant supply of water power for their blast even during dry spells, they had a long ditch dug from a nearby creek to Furnace Run, avoiding the inconvenient hazard of having the furnace shut down for lack of power.²⁴ Remains of the Hessian ditch are still easily identified.

These war years, with government contracts, plenty of labor, ample supplies of ore, wood and water, and experienced supervision, provided the capital for Coleman to expand his operations rapidly as soon as the war ended. By 1780 he was able to buy out John Dickinson's one-third interest in Elizabeth Furnace, thereby becoming part owner instead of lessor. By 1784, the Stedmans, who had suffered serious financial losses, sold him another one-third interest. The next year, in 1785, he bought Speedwell Forge from his father-in-law, James Old, for seven thousand pounds. A year later, in 1786, he was able to buy a one-sixth interest in the Cornwall Furnace property from the Grubbs, as well as a one-third interest in Upper and Lower Hopewell Forges, for eight thousand five hundred pounds. Thus, in six years, he had purchased two-thirds of Elizabeth Furnace, one-sixth of Cornwall, all of Speedwell and one-third of Upper and Lower Hopewell. The acquisition of all these properties involved approxi-

²¹ Col. Rec., X, 662.

²² Col. Rec., XI, 335.

²³ Penna. Arch., 1st Ser., V, 398.

²⁴ H. H. Beck, *Cannon Hill and the Hessian Ditch*, in Lanc. Co. Hist. Soc. Pubs., XLIV, No. 2 (1940), passim.

mately twenty-five thousand pounds, which is some indication of the success with which he had conducted his business during the war.²⁵

Even this was only the beginning rather than the end. In 1791 he built Colebrook Furnace and Mansion. Some few years later, in 1794, still living at Elizabeth Mansion, he purchased the remaining one-third of the Elizabeth Furnace property from Daniel Benezet. In 1798 he was able to buy the remainder of Curtis Grubb's Cornwall property, and half of Henry Bates Grubb's interest in that property, giving him five-sixth of Cornwall. In 1801 he purchased a share of Martic Forge in southern Lancaster County.

All this made an extremely complicated combination of ownerships, partnerships, shares and rights, which only an experienced administrator and accountant could have managed efficiently. It is easy to see how the rise of the corporation in later years would supplement and simplify the enterprise of a single industrialist like Coleman. Some idea of how complex this estate became is shown by the fact that when Coleman's four sons divided the estate with the sons of Henry Bates Grubb, it had to be divided into ninety-six parts, with the Colemans eventually receiving twenty ninety-sixths and the Grubbs receiving sixteen ninety-sixths.²⁶

As to its accumulated value, we can estimate something of the Coleman fortune by the division of the estate in 1832, when one of his four sons received properties valued at \$280,000 and a second son received property valued at \$270,000—well over a half million dollars in a partial settlement of the estate.

In any age or in any country, the possession of so much property was bound to bring about some political influence. Coleman

²⁵ The most complete account of the Coleman acquisitions is in Frederick K. Miller, *Rise of an Iron Community*, in *Leb. Co. Hist. Soc. Pubs.*, XII, No. 3B (1951); also A. C. Bining, *op. cit.*, Chap. 7.

²⁶ F. K. Miller, *op. cit.*, 73.

became an active participant in Pennsylvania's political affairs soon after the Revolution, and continued his activity for some years. This was not due entirely to his wealth, but in part because of his associations during the war. General Edward Hand, close friend of Washington's and his Adjutant-General, had lived in Lancaster since 1774, and in addition to constant military service, was active in the Pennsylvania legislature and the Continental Congress. Hand's daughter had married Edward Brien, ironmaster at Martic Furnace, establishing another bond between ironmasters, but Coleman and Hand were intimate friends anyway and soon became political associates. In Manheim, Robert Morris, financier of the Revolution, was a close neighbor, having purchased Stiegel's town house, and Morris was the member of the Constitutional Convention who had urged that Senators should be elected for life, and that they should be "only men of great and established property."²⁷ In 1792 Washington is believed to have visited Coleman at Elizabeth Mansion, in company with Morris, Rittenhouse, William Smith and others.²⁸ Clearly Coleman belonged properly to the Federalist clan, and could be expected to safeguard the principles which Hamilton had so prophetically proclaimed.

His first experience in politics came in 1783, when he was elected to the Pennsylvania legislature for a one year term. When the Federal Constitution was being debated in 1787, Coleman was a member of the Pennsylvania Convention which ratified it.²⁹ In 1790, when the radical Pennsylvania Constitution of 1776 was being revised, Coleman was elected to the State Constitutional Convention, and after the adoption of this new Constitution, he was commissioned as an Associate Judge in 1791, a position he

²⁷ J. B. McMaster and F. D. Stone, *Pennsylvania and the Federal Constitution*, Hist. Soc. of Pa., (1888) 704.

²⁸ H. M. J. Klein, *Lancaster County*, (N. Y., 1924) I, 511.

²⁹ McMaster and Stone, *op. cit.*, 725.

occupied for the next twenty years, often presiding as senior judge.³⁰

While Coleman was thus recognized as a political leader of some prominence among Pennsylvania's Federalists, he apparently exercised more influence in informal activities than in public debate, because he does not figure prominently in legislative discussions. However, his staunch adherence to Federalist principles had appreciable influence in national affairs during the 1790's. During this first decade of our national history, when the Federalist party was under violent attack from the growing democratic forces of Jefferson, and when party loyalties were changing from year to year, Coleman remained a solid rock of Federalist philosophy.

He was almost elected to the United States Senate in 1793, when the Pennsylvania legislature had elected Republican Albert Gallatin only to find him ineligible because of a technicality. When Pennsylvania had to choose again, Coleman was chosen as the Federalist nominee, but James Ross of Pittsburgh won by a vote of 45 to 35. It was one indication of the coming upsurge of republicanism and the growing influence of the west. A much closer battle took place in 1796. Pennsylvania was faced with a difficult problem because the complete returns for its fifteen presidential electors had not arrived in the governor's hands by the legal deadline period of fourteen days. Until the governor announced the electors, they could not vote, and if he proclaimed those who seemed to be elected on the basis of incomplete returns, Pennsylvania would go Federalist. If he waited for the western results, the vote would be Republican, and he would be accused of illegal delay to secure Republican results.³¹ He waited as long as he could and then announced the winning candidates, consisting of thirteen Republicans and two Federalists, Samuel

³⁰ Ellis and Evans, *Lancaster County*, (Phila., 1883) 225.

³¹ H. M. Tinkcom, *Republicans and Federalists in Pennsylvania*, (Harrisburg, 1950), 170.

Miles and Robert Coleman.³² When the delayed election returns finally arrived, they showed that the vote would have been conclusively Republican. Despite protests, the electors met, cast their ballots for President and Vice-President, and gave Jefferson 14 votes; Burr, 12; Pinckney, 3 and John Adams, 1. Of the two Federalist electors, Samuel Miles felt he must vote for Jefferson, but there was still one stubborn vote for Adams, from Robert Coleman. At the time, Coleman wrote to Jasper Yeates with apparent pride in his unpopular conviction, stating, "You will observe that one of the electors only had the hardiness to vote for this *monarchy man*, Mr. Adams, and you will easily conjecture which of them was so daring."³³

The historian Channing believed that Coleman's single vote in Pennsylvania had much to do with the defeat of Jefferson for the Presidency in 1796, and the election of Adams. Channing said, "Adams owed his place in 1796 to three nameless electors—one in Pennsylvania, (which was Coleman), another in Virginia and another in North Carolina. Why these electors or any one of them voted for Adams is unknown, but he plainly was President by accident."³⁴

But this was no accident for Coleman, for this was his most active political campaign. William Hamilton's *Lancaster Journal* had been extremely critical of the Federalists, and during court week, when the town was filled Coleman and one of his colleagues circulated a public petition trying to ruin the paper by binding signers to stop their subscriptions. It read in part, "Sire, from the date hereof you will please discontinue our subscription to your paper. Our respective accounts as soon as sent in will be paid."³⁵ The campaign was not too successful according to the indignant editor, who claimed that only twenty-seven subscribers

³² *Lancaster Journal*, Dec. 2, 1796.

³³ MSS. in Stauffer Collection, Hist. Soc. of Pa., XX, 1553. Dec. 7, 1796.

³⁴ Edward Channing, *History*, IV, 217.

³⁵ *Lancaster Journal*, Dec. 16, 1796.

were lost, but that he gained thirty-five new ones. Editorial comment shortly afterwards stated, "As soon as a man possesses wealth he is at liberty to abuse his fellow-citizens freely with impunity."³⁶

A few years later Coleman had another brush with the press, when Editor Dickson of the *Intelligencer* was indicted for libel by a grand jury composed mostly of Federalists. With the legislature in session in Lancaster, the trial continued for three days with a jury equally divided, but Judges Coleman and Henry refused to let them out until they reached a verdict, and finally, suffering from cold and hunger, they emerged with a verdict of guilty, whereupon the judges sentenced the editor to three months in prison and a fine of \$500.³⁷ The Federalists were losing legislative and executive control, but like their eminent leader, John Marshall, they usually managed to retain control of the courts.

Coleman was active again in 1800, when the confused political situation required a special session of the legislature to choose presidential electors. After a bitter parliamentary battle, sixteen electors were nominated, of whom fifteen were to be chosen. Coleman was one of the nominees, but was sixteenth in the results,³⁸ so that eight Republicans and seven Federalists were elected, giving Jefferson and Burr the majority. Governor McKean was greatly concerned about the close margin and wrote to Jefferson, "Thirteen Senators had defied the general will. Henry Miller, General Hand, Robert Coleman, and others have been in this borough almost constantly since the Legislature have been convened, keeping the thirteen firm to the party."³⁹ But the Federalists were on the way out, and Coleman was now out of politics in an official capacity.

His military career was over too, although in 1795 he had

³⁶ Ibid., Dec. 30, 1796.

³⁷ Ellis and Evans, *op. cit.*, 499.

³⁸ Lancaster *Intelligencer*, Dec. 3, 1800.

³⁹ McKean to Jefferson, Dec. 15, 1800, in Tinkcom, *op. cit.*, 253.

taken one last fling when, as Captain of the Lancaster Troop of Light Horse, he took his company of thirty-five cavalrymen to Western Pennsylvania on the grand expedition to suppress the Whiskey Rebellion,⁴⁰ in which all good Federalists would certainly participate. Although his Troop re-elected him Captain the following year, he finally declined, graciously announcing in the newspaper: "The pleasure which I experienced from the harmony prevailing among us and the promptitude and cheerfulness with which any duty assigned you was performed on the late Western expedition are circumstances which will ever be remembered by me."⁴¹

In 1809 he became a resident of Lancaster, moving from Elizabeth Mansion to a house on East King Street about one-half block from the square, on the north side. He had a family of ten children by this time, five sons and five daughters, and had sent two of his children to old Franklin College the first year it opened, in 1787.⁴² Leaving some of the management of his estates to his sons, he became active in community affairs, as might be expected from one of his position. He became a bank director when the Bank of Pennsylvania established its branch in Lancaster.⁴³ He was a member of the Select Council of Lancaster when the town was first incorporated. He was one of the trustees of Franklin College. He was interested in St. James Episcopal Church, and the Coleman family sat with the Hand family and the Yeates family on Sunday mornings.⁴⁴ He became a famous citizen of Lancaster, and when Lafayette visited Lancaster in 1825, he went out of his way to visit "the aged patriot and revolutionary officer, Robert Coleman."⁴⁵

⁴⁰ Penna. Arch. 6th Ser., V, 358; 9th Ser., II, 919.

⁴¹ *Lancaster Journal*, Oct. 7, 1796.

⁴² Franklin College MSS, 1787.

⁴³ *Lancaster Journal*, Mar. 15, 1803.

⁴⁴ H. M. J. Klein and W. F. Diller, *History of St. James' Church*, (Lanc., 1944), 78.

⁴⁵ *Lancaster Journal*, Aug. 5, 1825.

A Philadelphian who visited Lancaster in 1809, having dinner at Slough's Tavern, on the square, wrote, "Here I had the pleasure to see some friends—Judge Coleman, one of the most respectable men in Pennsylvania and one of the wealthiest in the United States. His fortune has been acquired in a few years altogether by iron works. He informs me that he makes annually 2000 tons of pig-iron and 1100 tons of bar-iron."⁴⁶

Like all prominent citizens, Coleman was always on the contributor's lists, although not with extravagant amounts. When everybody else contributed \$10 to the Female Benevolent Society (antecedent of the Community Chest movement) Coleman contributed \$20. When everybody in the community subscribed to one share of the Philadelphia and Lancaster Turnpike Company, Coleman subscribed for two shares. But even though he was withdrawing from active business enterprise, his financial and commercial interests seemed to grow as if he had the golden touch of Midas. He kept buying small shares or investing funds in many enterprises which seemed to be on the verge of failure, and then, through careful accounting and judicious opportunism, raised them to a successful and profitable status. On one occasion he purchased a small share of an almost defunct shipping enterprise, which operated a trading ship, the *General Hand*, between Baltimore and the West Indies. The ship was about to be sold, but Coleman sent the products of Martic Forge and Speedwell by river routes along the Susquehanna to Port Deposit and Baltimore, and within a short time, the first shipment of American iron to go to the East Indies was on its way, and the *General Hand* departed on a two-year venture around the world with a cargo valued at \$9000.⁴⁷

In the same year that Coleman moved to Lancaster, a young

⁴⁶ Joshua Gilpin, in *Pa. Mag. of Hist. and Biog.*, L, p. 73.

⁴⁷ Jasper Yeates-Brinton MSS, in *Hist. Soc. of Pa.*, 4 Dec., 20 Dec., 1819; 25 June, 1821; 3 May 1822.

man graduated from Dickinson College, not without some difficulty. James Buchanan, after having been expelled for disorderly conduct, was finally permitted to graduate after some mild wire-pulling, and moved to Lancaster to study law, at the age of eighteen. Coleman's three youngest daughters were Harriet, who died the following year at the age of ten; Ann, who was thirteen, and Sarah, who was seven.

Within a few years, double tragedy was to strike the Coleman household in connection with these two girls. Young James Buchanan had met and courted lovely Ann Coleman, the judge's daughter and heiress to the largest fortune in Pennsylvania. What father Coleman thought of the intended match is not known, but it is quite possible that he may have preferred that his daughter marry someone in business or industry, rather than in the somewhat impecunious profession of law.

In December, 1819, one of Ann's girl friends, perhaps slightly jealous, started the rumor which began a hasty quarrel between the two young lovers. Ann refused to see Buchanan and went angrily to Philadelphia. A week from the day she left Lancaster, her remains were brought back in a coffin, for she had died suddenly, and almost mysteriously. King Street society buzzed with gossip, inventing stories of suicide, broken hearts, and somehow blaming Buchanan for her death. The Coleman family may have felt the same way, for Judge Coleman would not allow Buchanan to view the body nor to join the mourners at the funeral.⁴⁸ Perhaps the shock of her unexpected death led the family to blame Buchanan, through that easy but illogical form of reasoning which argued that if there had been no lover there would have been no lover's quarrel, and if there had been no quarrel there would have been no emotional upset and consequently no fatality. This was not scientific reasoning, but in the

⁴⁸ Philip S. Klein, *James Buchanan and Ann Coleman*, in *Penna. History*, XXI, No. 1 (1954), passim.

absence of a definitive medical report, it served the purpose. Buchanan left Lancaster shortly thereafter, to enter a career in politics, but he kept a portrait of Ann Coleman with him, and it hung over the mantel in his bedroom at Wheatland during his life there, and still remains in the same place.

Strangely enough, a few years later a tragedy of remarkable similarity occurred in the Coleman household, involving younger daughter Sarah Hand Coleman, and a young minister, William Augustus Muhlenberg. Coleman had been active in planning and building the new St. James' Church, and had even collected \$100 from James Buchanan, who was not a member but had little choice in the matter. The young minister, twenty-four years old, became a close friend of Sarah Coleman's. How the match might have progressed is not known, but when Muhlenberg proposed the innovation of evening services in the church, Coleman opposed it vigorously.⁴⁹ A division in the church took place, with Muhlenberg insisting on his plans for the evening service. Coleman forbade the young rector to enter his house, and when Coleman died in 1825 the dispute was still unsettled, but had affected the whole family. Edward Coleman, one of Robert's sons, resigned as registrar of the vestry when they decided to go ahead with the evening service.⁵⁰

Two months after Coleman's death, at almost the same age as her sister Ann, Sarah Coleman went to Philadelphia and died just as suddenly and unexpectedly as her sister had died six years earlier.⁵¹ Young Muhlenberg found himself in much the same position as James Buchanan, bereft of his love. A considerable amount of romantic gossip circulated again in Lancaster society, to the effect that Muhlenberg stood by the coffin and placed a ring, and a copy of his famous hymn, "I would Not Live Alway," with the remains, but this seems very unlikely. Muhlenberg left

⁴⁹ Ann Ayres, *Life and Work of William Augustus Muhlenberg*, 69.

⁵⁰ Klein and Diller, *op. cit.*, 103.

⁵¹ *Lancaster Journal*, Nov. 4, 1825.

Lancaster shortly afterwards, but not of his own volition. Edward Coleman gave the vestry a simple but definite alternative: he would give \$5000 to the church, if all connection between Muhlenberg and the church were dissolved. The vestry took the \$5000, evening services were ended for a while, and Muhlenberg, like Buchanan, never married.

Coleman was seventy-seven at the time of his death, on August 14, 1825. The *Lancaster Journal* stated, "Thus has departed from us, full of age and honor, a man who stood first among those who must ever rank as the most valuable members of society, and the most revered examples to mankind . . . He has long retired from public business, finding sufficient employment in the management of his immense estates, and spreading the wealth which an age of enterprise and industry had acquired in promoting the improvement of his country and dispensing comfort and happiness around him."⁵² Whether Buchanan and Muhlenberg would have agreed with the latter statement is problematical.

His will was fairly simple, although the eventual settlement of the great estate led to years and years of litigation. He provided his wife with an annuity, and left her his town house, his furniture, his library, his gold watch, his carriage and his cows. His sons received all the iron furnace estates. His two married daughters received considerable real estate, and bequests in excess of \$50,000 each. His unmarried daughter Sarah was very carefully provided for, receiving in addition to a house and half of a well and half of a pump located on the boundary line, the sum of \$50,000, carefully guarded against a possible fortune-seeking husband. His will stated, "With an anxious view to the future interest, benefit and support of my dear daughter Sarah, and to guard against possible difficulties from which none can flatter themselves that they will be exempted, she now being un-

⁵² *Lancaster Journal*, Aug. 19, 1825.

married," her brothers were entrusted with the \$50,000 for her, with the provision that if she married her husband would have no power to assign the money, that if she had children, the money would go to her children, and that if there was no issue, the money would go to her sisters after her death.⁵³ Nobody was going to marry Sarah for her money, or if he did, he would have a hard time getting it.

And so the immigrant from Ireland, clerk and book-keeper, soldier, ironmaster, politician, judge and banker made his millions and disposed of them. But what of Dickinson College?

Unfortunately there is no evidence that Coleman contributed vast amounts of money to Dickinson. He became a trustee in 1802, perhaps because of his earlier relation with John Dickinson. The college was a very controversial topic in the legislature at that time. At the time of the disastrous fire in 1803, when Mr. Mitchell presented petitions to the legislature requesting aid for rebuilding,⁵⁴ James Ross delivered a violent criticism of the institution, stating that "it was placed in a bad soil, it could not produce good fruit; that it had sent forth a parcel of fellows to pray upon the public, and that if it did not flourish it ought to be moved to another place; that it was in an ungrateful county that would not pay their taxes, that they owed \$97,000 and if they had paid the interest, it would have built two such colleges."⁵⁵

Since Coleman and Ross were now close friends, and since Coleman's son married Ross's daughter, perhaps Federalist opposition to Cumberland County Republicanism had something to do with legislative indifference to the petition. It is quite probable that Coleman may have been of help to Dickinson at this or other times, but no record has been found. Certainly if Dickinson ever needed a millionaire, this would have been an

⁵³ Lanc. Co. Will Book 0, 1, 347.

⁵⁴ Lancaster *Intelligencer*, Mar. 15, 1803

⁵⁵ Lancaster *Journal*, Feb. 26, 1803.

appropriate time, but maybe it had the unfortunate reputation of being a little too liberal. However, Coleman's heirs did donate funds to Dickinson College for the endowment of a professorship, which after many years, appropriately became the Robert Coleman Chair of History.

As we look back over the long and active life of this early American industrialist, we can perhaps see a pattern of purpose and interest which has become more characteristic of our American life than we may realize. Coleman might be called the Hamiltonian ideal, in many respects. His adherence to Federalism was certainly not blind party allegiance—it was the normal and natural result of his career. His early contacts with the Continental Congress had given him some idea of the national aspects of industrial production. His experience with the formation of the conservative Pennsylvania Constitution of 1790 must have made him distrustful of the radical element that had tied Pennsylvania's state government into helplessness and futility. The competition from a superior quality of Swedish and Russian iron made him sympathetic to tariff programs which would protect American manufacturers. As a banker himself, he had no qualms about extending credit to commercial or business enterprises which promised a reasonable chance of growth or recuperation. As the feudal lord of an ironmaster's manor, he would certainly have had more confidence in his own ability, and that of his fellow-ironmasters, to provide for the welfare of the mass of workers and artisans under his benevolent supervision, than to have trusted political or economic decisions to their proletarian judgment. He was the fore-runner of an important and distinctive American type which was to represent a significant ideal of the 19th and 20th century. Here was the tradition of the self-made man (if we ignore the matter of an appropriate marriage for the moment). Here was the comfortable security of wealth, and, because of it, a somewhat stubborn conviction that when a decision

had to be made, it would be the correct decision and would be regarded with proper respect and obedience. Here was a solid and sincere sense of moral integrity, and a recognition of spiritual responsibilities.

These three men, Dickinson, Stiegel and Coleman, whose careers were so strongly inter-locked at one time, represent three distinctive American types—all very different, but all part of the American scene. Dickinson was the conservative statesman, whose words and ideas provided a standard that led many of his fellow-Americans through the confusion of revolutionary and post-revolutionary complications, with a confident vision of the future. There were to be others like him—Marshall, Lincoln, and Wilson were of the same sort. Stiegel as the adventurer, whose reckless optimism and enthusiastic pioneering refused to recognize defeat as long as there was the slightest possibility of success, who never achieved material success, but whose unquenchable energy paved the way for more stable developments. Coleman was the methodical and ambitious industrial executive, who quietly and confidently calculated every risk and every opportunity, and built his empire step by step by trusting to his own good judgment.

Men like Dickinson have achieved historical immortality because of their words and their ideals; Stiegel's name is well-known because of his picturesque behavior and his dramatic rise and fall. But people like Peter Cooper, James Old, Abram Hewitt and Robert Coleman never secured the same kind of immortality, although their contributions were important. They have been treated as a mysterious aristocracy, usually envied, sometimes denounced, but normally respected though rarely famous. There is much in the career of a man like Coleman to inspire respect rather than envy. His empire was built by his own venture and his own capital, rather than by the manipulation of stockholder's contributions. He had opportunities for

exercising or abusing political power, but confined his political activity to his major responsibilities, without using his wealth for political control. He accomplished his success in a pioneer's frontier of primitive manufacturing, rather than in the lush years of the industrial boom of the nineteenth century, when the making of a million was often a combination of gambler's luck, political graft and highway robbery.

These characteristics have been both admired and criticized in American life. Cynics have attached undue importance to logical marriages; firm convictions have been labelled as indications of ruthless or arbitrary dictatorship, and moral integrity has been called hypocrisy, when wealth is involved. But in later years, many captains of industry and barons of business were to shape the pattern of American life as Coleman had done. They were supremely confident, but not boastful; they were venturesome but not reckless; they were generous but not spendthrift; they were strict because it was a moral obligation to demand what was right as they saw it. These were the "successful" Americans—and they knew it.

UNCLE JAMES MADISON
and DICKINSON COLLEGE

RALPH L. KETCHAM

February 7, 1958

Ralph L. Ketcham, D.S.S.

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UNCLE JAMES MADISON *and* DICKINSON COLLEGE

1794 was a year of more than ordinary significance for Orange County in the Virginia Piedmont. Although scarcely seventy years earlier it had been on the unsurveyed frontier, it was already beginning to wear the settled aspect of a land more attractive to old and established men than to the young and adventuresome. At least nine of the grandchildren of James Taylor II, the first prominent settler of Orange County in 1722, had moved to the Ohio Valley to lay claim to over 23,000 acres of virgin land which was their bounty for service in the Revolutionary Army.¹ Another grandson, Colonel James Madison, Sr., in his 72nd year, was surrounded by the rapidly growing families of his seven children who still lived in Orange. Indeed, even his eldest son, James, was at long last to exchange, as he himself later put it, "the galling burden of bachelorhood for the easy yoke of matrimony"² by marrying the charming and vivacious Dolley Todd of Philadelphia. Although the elder Madison was one of the most substantial planters in the foothills of the Blue Ridge, like most of his kind he was poor in cash, and looked

¹ Diary of Francis Taylor of Orange County, 1780-1800, and Taylor Family Genealogies in the possession of E. H. Taylor Hay, Chicago, Ill. Original of the Diary is in the Virginia State Library. See also Irving Brant, *James Madison*, 5 vols., Indianapolis, 1941-56, for general background.

² James Madison to James K. Paulding, May 10, 1827, William C. Rives Papers, Box 153, Library of Congress.

himself to speculations in the blue grasslands of Kentucky to provide his family with the kind of comfortable estate he had made for himself on the red earth of Virginia. Into this pattern of substantial though perhaps passing planter prosperity, was born Colonel Madison's newest grandson, Robert L., offspring of the youngest son, William, who was well established in his own house less than three miles from his father's Montpelier mansion. As he first breathed the fresh air of the Virginia highlands, Robert could scarcely have known that events were already conspiring to send him to the struggling college in Carlisle founded with the support and patronage of two illustrious friends of his Uncle James, John Dickinson and Dr. Benjamin Rush.

Robert L. Madison was one of eleven children born to William and Frances Throckmorton Madison, both of whose ancestors had lived in Virginia since the middle of the 17th century. William Madison was born in 1762, eleven years after the birth of his brother James, and by the beginning of the Revolution had already proved his hardihood by surviving a dysentery epidemic which carried off a brother, a sister and numerous Madison slaves in 1775. He doubtless received his early instruction from the Rev. Thomas Martin who lived at Montpelier during the 1760's, mainly to prepare William's brother, the future President, for admission to the College of New Jersey located at Princeton. Upon his return to Virginia from Princeton in 1772, James Madison occupied his time with both his own studies, and the instruction of the numerous younger Madisons in the rudiments of learning. Still suspect of the frivolous and intolerant atmosphere thought by the Madisons to prevail at William and Mary, William was sent at age 15 to newly opened Hampden-Sidney College in Southside Virginia, conducted by the learned and open-minded Samuel Stanhope Smith, a college chum of James Madison and a future president of

Princeton. When the stringencies of the Revolution forced Hampden-Sidney to suspend instruction, William transferred to William and Mary where he became an early member of Phi Beta Kappa, after which he served short hitches in the militia before receiving a lieutenant's commission in the Virginia Line in time to serve at the siege of Yorktown, all before his twentieth birthday. He considered careers in law and politics, but was dissuaded from at least the latter by his brother James, then serving in the Continental Congress during its darkest days, who advised his father that "brother Willey" would find much more drudgery and frustration than fame and fortune in a public career.³ With three older brothers before him on the family estate, it is understandable that William would consider a career away from home. He considered the possibility of seeking his fortune in Kentucky along with his Taylor cousins and many other adventuresome Virginians. He also served briefly and inconspicuously in the Virginia legislature during the 1790's. All in all, one gathers the impression that in his own early years William Madison started several careers with little success or determination, and that, mainly by default, he settled down to a rather routine and impecunious life as a Virginia planter.

During the first twenty years of their marriage, William and Frances Madison produced the usual large family of the day. The male children of the marriage, like their father, faced the problem of finding careers for themselves, with still less hope of residing prosperously on the family lands in Orange. The year 1801, however, produced slightly wider prospects for William and his family—James Madison, Sr., died leaving his extensive estate, administered by his two surviving sons, to his children, and the younger James Madison became Secretary of

³ Letters from James Madison, Jr. to James Madison, Sr., New York Public Library and Library of Congress. See also James Madison, Jr., to Ambrose Madison [his brother], Oct. 11, 1787, New York Public Library, and Virginia Waller Davis, "The founders of Phi Beta Kappa," *The Key Reporter*, XXV, No. 4, Summer, 1960.

State and virtually deputy president in the administration of Thomas Jefferson. Perhaps now William could procure livelihoods for his children from his share of his father's estate and some patronage from his brother's high executive office. The eldest sons, John and William, corresponded with their uncle in Washington who advised John on his attendance at William and Mary, and supported William's career as a midshipman in the U. S. Navy. The younger sons, Alfred, Ambrose, Robert, and James, were also in one way or another to depend for advice and support upon their Uncle James. The father William, in the meantime, struggled with the legal problems arising from the settlement of his father's estate, and helped in the management of the Montpelier plantation during his brother's absence in the National Capital.⁴ Thus it appears that with the significant difference that their uncle was to be President of the United States, the sons of William Madison faced maturity with problems common in early 19th century Virginia—declining fortunes on the paternal estate, competition for favor and status in a large family, and the frustration that accompanies a dull age which remembers the glory of a Revolution for freedom.

But still another specter haunted the Madisons of Orange County during the Jeffersonian administrations—tuberculosis. Member after member of the family coughed, grew consumptive, and gradually lost strength until claimed by the grave. In 1802 it was Nelly Madison Hite, eldest sister of the President, and in 1812 Dr. John Willis, husband of James Madison's favorite niece, Nelly Conway Madison, son of brother Ambrose who had himself probably died of tuberculosis in 1793.⁵ During Madison's presidency, the children of William Madison reached the dangerous age and began to fall victim themselves. In 1810, Alfred Madison, whose superior talents and amiable disposition

⁴ Letters, William Madison to James Madison to James Madison, 1801-11, Princeton University Library.

⁵ *Ibid.*

had attracted the special attention of his uncle in Washington, was sent to Philadelphia armed with letters to the President's friends, Dr. Benjamin Rush and Dr. Philip Syngé Physick, in the desperate hope these famed physicians could cure the dread progress of consumption.⁶ In 1814, Robert wrote from Carlisle to his uncle that he had heard of the death of his sister Lucy, but was not surprised since he "was certain from the first [that] she could not long survive her complaint."⁷ Small wonder that the young student had become fatalistic about the intrepidity of a disease which had so decimated his family. Indeed, the experience of Robert Madison in this regard was not at all unusual in a day of frequent births and nearly as frequent deaths, however singularly tragic it might appear in our own antiseptic age.

But as the precocious Alfred succumbed in spite of the treatment of Doctors Rush and Physick, the perhaps equally talented Robert reached an age where the intellectual and financial resources of his uncle's establishment in Washington were required to fulfill that day's equivalent of "education for the gifted child." In the fall of 1812, Robert went to the Federal City, then full of the excitement and dismay which accompanied the first months of war with England. From October 1812 until March 1813, he studied under the Rev. Dr. James Laurie along with James Gallatin, eldest son of the Secretary of the Treasury. For this service to the nephew, Rev. Laurie, a noted humanitarian and later one of the directors of the American Colonization Society, received \$50 from the President of the United States.⁸ Since Robert lived with his aunt and uncle during these six months, we may imagine that he not only shared in the exultation which accompanied the news of the thrilling sea victories

⁶ James Madison to Dr. Benjamin Rush, Oct. 29, 1810, Franklin D. Roosevelt Library, Hyde Park, New York.

⁷ Robert L. Madison to James Madison, Feb. 13, 1814, New York Public Library.

⁸ See Dr. Laurie's sworn statement of April 29, 1846, in the Dolley P. Madison Papers, Library of Congress.

over the British, but also learned by observation if not direct exhortation from the President as the great measures of war and national exertion were carried out. He doubtless shared, too, since he was past his eighteenth birthday, in the social life of the Capital, then dominated in the younger set by his Aunt Dolley's son, the handsome and frivolous Payne Todd. Some of the adventures open to young men who basked in executive favor must have already hummed about Washington as both Payne Todd and James Gallatin prepared to accompany Albert Gallatin on a diplomatic mission to the fabled courts of the giants of Europe, the Emperor Napoleon and Czar Alexander of Russia. With regret and perhaps a twinge of resentment at his uncle for not sending him too on the voyage abroad in April 1813, Robert left the excitement of Washington for the college in Carlisle where a different sort of excitement awaited him.

Robert Madison arrived in Carlisle during the years Thomas Cooper was professor of at least Chemistry, Medicine, and Law at Dickinson. This career, and the attendant struggle with the devoted Calvinist president, Jeremiah Atwater, was the subject of a lecture in this series delivered four years ago by Dr. Whitfield J. Bell, Jr. There can be little doubt that Cooper's presence at Carlisle was a principal reason for the selection of Dickinson as the college for Robert Madison. Upon his arrival in Carlisle, Robert presented a letter from his uncle to "Judge Cooper" and perhaps he stayed with Cooper during his years at Dickinson, since Cooper did board students during his tenure on the faculty.⁹ Cooper, a friend of both Madison and Jefferson, shared the political liberalism and intellectual enthusiasms of these Virginia statesmen, and as much as any man in America, he embodied the enlightenment virtues Madison was to seek so diligently in prospective faculty members for the University of

⁹ Robert L. Madison to James Madison, Apr. 22, 1813, New York Public Library; James Henry Morgan, *Dickinson College, 1783-1933*, Carlisle, 1933, facsimile of 1811 catalogue, opposite p. 193.

Virginia during his years on the Board of Visitors of that institution. To find such a figure at a college scarcely one hundred miles from Washington and two hundred miles from Orange was rare good luck. Furthermore, Dickinson seems to have been a favorite resort for young students from Virginia from its earliest days. John Moore, a cousin of the Madisons, was a student "at Carlisle" in 1792, and in the three classes at Dickinson with whom Robert Madison is most likely to have associated, there were actually more Virginians than Pennsylvanians.¹⁰ The names of prominent Virginia families dot the record—Mercer, Carter, Randolph, Tyler, Page, Harrison, Mason, etc. Also, the western and northern counties such as Loudoun, Prince William, Frederick, and Madison appear most frequently among the Virginia entries. When one adds to the students from the Old Dominion those from Maryland and the District of Columbia, there is a solid majority from south of the Mason-Dixon line during the War of 1812 years.¹¹ It seems clear that the adjacent Piedmont and Great Valley regions of the South provided the dominant strand in the student body of that day, which may explain why President Jeremiah Atwater, fresh from the Puritan colleges of New England, was so shocked at what to him was the slovenly, undisciplined manner of the students, especially the Southerners, at Dickinson.¹² Perhaps, too, there is some relationship between this condition of the Southerners and the fact that less than one in five of the Virginians in the classes of 1814 and 1815 graduated while more than half of the Pennsylvanians in the same classes received diplomas.¹³

In any case, arriving in Carlisle amid a not unfamiliar student

¹⁰ "Diary of Francis Taylor," 1792, and Reed's *Alumni Record of Dickinson College*.

¹¹ Reed's *Alumni Record*.

¹² Whitfield J. Bell, Jr., "Thomas Cooper as Professor of Chemistry at Dickinson College, 1811-1815," *Journal of the History of Medicine and Allied Sciences*, Vol. VIII, No. 1, p. 71.

¹³ Reed's *Alumni Record*.

body and with a patron on the faculty, Robert Madison reported enthusiastically to his uncle. Carlisle was "remarkably healthy, the scenery beautiful and picturesque, and their [sic] is no incentive to vice and dissipation." The faculty he found numerous and eminent, Judge Cooper was "a man of very extensive information and of very great industry," and he had joined one of two "debating institutions," the Union Philosophical Society, which "has a very well selected historical library containing nearly nine hundred Volumes." Following this brief, optimistic report, young Madison hastily subscribed himself as an "affectionate nephew" after complaining that he had been "very unwell since coming to Carlisle."¹⁴ President Madison's response, perhaps recalling his own student days at Princeton when he had seriously injured his health as a result of too intensive study, was confined mainly to parental injunctions "to be careful of your health." After expressing anxiety about the course of study his nephew proposed to pursue, Uncle James closed his short letter with news of the family and "affectionate regards" in which Aunt Dolley joined.¹⁵ In a day when stenographers and dictaphones were unknown, one can imagine the concern and thoughtfulness required of the President to write his nephew a personal note amid the heavy burdens of his high office. A letter to John Adams written two days earlier mentioned a host of problems—appointment of a successor to Dr. Benjamin Rush as Treasurer of the United States Mint, John Quincy Adams' mission to Russia, and the uncertainty of the peace negotiations then underway.¹⁶ With a bright impression of his educational prospects at Dickinson, and friendly support from the President in

¹⁴ Robert L. Madison to James Madison, Apr. 22, 1813, New York Public Library.

¹⁵ James Madison to Robert L. Madison, May 5, 1813, Washington University Libraries, St. Louis, Missouri.

¹⁶ James Madison to John Adams, May 5, 1813, Adams Manuscript Trust, Massachusetts Historical Society.

Washington, we may imagine that Young Robert quickly recovered his health, and plunged into the feast of learning set before him.

But his next letter, written July 25 to Aunt Dolley because of his uncle's serious illness, indicates that even in those idyllic days, students at Dickinson wrestled with difficult problems. Putting first things first, Robert allied himself with college students of all time by thanking his aunt for sixty dollars which was "very acceptable" to him because he "had been compelled to employ a Physician during my sickness, and also to purchase some books which expended all the money that I brought with me." One is staggered at the thought of how many such sentences must have been in the letters of Dickinson students in the past one hundred seventy years! The next paragraph, which also has a timeless quality about it, is worth quoting in full:

"I have been rather unpleasantly situated for some time past. Their has been and is at present a great deal of commotion among the students and Faculty, and although I am not engaged in it in the remotest degree, still it is very disagreeable—their (sic) has been several expulsions and twenty one suspended for refusing to obey one of the laws of the institution. A very unfortunate affair took place about a fortnight ago. An amiable young man, (the only son of Mr. Champ Carter Carter (sic) of Virginia) in a fray with another student received a blow on his head with a pair of snuffers which fractured his skull. The Physicians were not able to remove the coagulated blood from the brain, and he expired on the eighth day. I have been particular in mentioning the above circumstances in order to convince you that I have not been engaged in anything of the kind."¹⁷

Some interesting questions suggest themselves as a result of this account. What sort of wrath could Robert have expected from the Presidential Mansion if he failed to establish his innocence in the reported disorders? Was an early blow of the Civil War struck at Dickinson College by an irate Northerner who

¹⁷ Robert L. Madison to Dolley P. Madison, July 25, 1813, New York Public Library.

polished off a member of the famous Carter clan of Virginia with such a dangerous weapon as a pair of snuffers? Is it possible that the medical students of Thomas Cooper profited more from their study of the treatment of the blow on the head than did the unfortunate patient? One wonders, too, whether young Robert might not have retired too much from the excitement of the day. After all, in an age of gallantry and personal strife, dueling with pairs of snuffers might provide valuable training for future engagements on the field of honor. In any event, Robert closed his dutiful if over-unctuous letter with solicitations for his uncle's health and "sincere acknowledgement" of his aunt's interest in his welfare which, he said, "has created a sentiment in my heart which will never cease to exist, until that heart ceases to throb."¹⁸

The next surviving letter, written in the fall after the President returned to Washington from Virginia restored to perfect health, opens with a routine discussion of schedule problems, and continues with the even more routine request for more funds, this time for 250 dollars which Robert hoped "you will not consider extravagant when you reflect that I have clothing and a good many books to purchase and also a room to rent in town." Robert informed his uncle that at Judge Cooper's suggestion he was discontinuing his reading of history to spend more time with books on political economy, a subject of which Cooper was a "perfect master." As proof of Cooper's competence, young Madison offered the articles written on the subject by the Judge in the *Emporium* to which Robert hoped the President subscribed, lacking which, copies would be forwarded from Carlisle.

Even better, since Dr. Justus Erich Bollman, participant in the Burr conspiracy and pamphleteer on banking problems, intended to debate with Cooper in the *Emporium's* pages, a "very animated discussion" was expected from the stimulation provided

¹⁸ *Ibid.*

by such able competitors. If Robert's reactions were shared by very many of his fellow students, the halls and rooming houses at Dickinson must have resounded with the clash of minds as well as the clash of snuffers during the War of 1812. Public speaking too was in a flourishing state since Robert reported that Dr. James Ogilvie, who was at the College for ten days as an orator, "was superior to any person I have heard in Congress"—quite a statement when one remembers that Henry Clay, Daniel Webster, Rufus King, John Randolph of Roanoke, and other great speakers had exercised their vocal cords in Washington during Robert's residence there with his uncle. The President's nephew concluded his letter with an endorsement of the character of "Mr. Lamberton who is a candidate for the Collectorship of this district." Mr. Lamberton was discreet, smart, a staunch republican who had opposed successfully both Clintonians and federalists, and, moreover, he also had the support of Judges Cooper, Hamilton, and Brackenridge,¹⁹ the latter a friend of James Madison's since his own college days at Princeton forty years ago. With such a distinguished array of supporters, at least three of whom had a close personal relationship with the President, it would be no surprise to find that Mr. Lamberton was installed quickly as the local revenue agent.

Back to his studies following the excursion into politics, Robert asked his uncle in a letter written two days after Christmas if he could commence the private study of law under Judge Cooper after the first of the year. Obviously impressed with Cooper's ability, young Madison was anxious to be prepared for the beginning of the formal lectures on the law scheduled for the spring. Robert reported he had read the international law theorists "Vattell" [sic] and Burlamaqui, and had started on Grotius in Latin, but gave up since he "thought that I would not

¹⁹ Robert L. Madison to James Madison, Oct. [19], 1813, New York Public Library.

be compensated for the time it would require to peruse him attentively in Latin." The proposal for the winter term was "to devote the morning principally to the study of the Law, and the Evening in attending to the Latin and French languages as a kind of relaxation from more laborious pursuits." This pattern of study, added to the earlier disgust at disorders in the college and enthusiasm for the political economy debates, draws a picture of a most serious student indeed. In fact, Robert Madison seems to have acquired a stimulating and well-rounded education at Dickinson, since he closed the Christmas letter with the notice that at a recent "Chymical examination" the students had "acquitted themselves tolerably well."²⁰ Letters to both his father and Uncle James in February 1814 indicate that the study of law with Judge Cooper had not been readily agreed to, and Robert took advantage of a visit to Washington by the Judge to urge again that he be permitted to undertake the legal study. Some college politics seem to be reflected in Robert's request that his father authorize him to omit some of the required subjects of the institution, presumably to give him time for the private law study. The college rule requiring such permission had only just been enforced, perhaps in an effort to prevent students from neglecting required subjects in order to study privately with Cooper—exactly the course young Madison had proposed to his uncle and father. In the struggle between President Atwater and Judge Cooper, it is apparent that Robert's sympathies were all with Cooper. He told his father that Cooper was "one of the greatest Jurists in this country" who labored greatly for the benefit of his students, and he expressed to his uncle his gratitude to Cooper and "his amiable family for the kind solicitude which they have on all occasions manifested in my welfare." This was especially appreciated in Carlisle, said young Madison to the

²⁰ Robert L. Madison to James Madison, Dec. 27, 1813, New York Public Library.

President, "where the generality of the people are penurious in their dealings, illiberal and prejudiced in their opinions and persecuting in their dispositions."²¹ Thus in less than a year, Robert Madison had changed his mind about the ideal setting which Carlisle provided for collegiate education, and now felt that only the presence of his uncle's good friend made further study at Dickinson tolerable.

The drums of war, however, were soon to drown out the din of academic squabbles. In the February letter, Robert mentioned the destruction of the volunteer militia company to which he belonged, because of an act of the state legislature, but the British campaign in the Chesapeake which resulted in the burning of Washington changed everything. In a letter written in September on his knapsack in a military camp near Philadelphia, Robert reported that after his return to Carlisle from Washington where he had spent part of the summer, his law studies had been interrupted by the urgent call for militia volunteers which followed the British attack on the capital. Along with fifteen other students "prompted by an ardent desire to assist in repelling the attacks of a cruel and audacious foe" he joined a company and marched with great fatigue the one hundred twenty miles to Philadelphia.

Camped with General Bloomfield's forces on Bushhill, Robert was a private in Bache's 2nd Light Infantry Regiment commanded by Captain Joseph Halbert.²² Robert found the state of defenses pitiful—his camp contained but five hundred men, "most of them destitute of discipline, arms, or ammunition." The situation was aggravated by the "inhabitants of Philadelphia

²¹ Robert L. Madison to William Madison, Feb. 9, 1814; Robert L. Madison to James Madison, Feb. 13, 1814, New York Public Library.

²² Military Service Record photostats, in the General Reference Division of the National Archives. Courtesy of Dr. W. Niel Franklin. Also, see Ellis P. Oberhaltzer, *Philadelphia*, Vol. II, p. 19.

[who] appear to be dead to anything like patriotism, and I believe the city could be taken with all imaginable ease by a force of 10,000 men." It is not known whether the President acted upon this intelligence from his buck-private nephew. In any case, Robert hoped he could soon return to Carlisle to resume his law studies with "increased ardor."²³ Thus, apparently, military service heightened his zeal for learning, even if he was not convinced of the courage of the citizens of the nation's largest city. Forty-five days after enlistment and fifteen dollars richer if he retained the pay recorded on his service voucher, Robert returned to the picturesque scenery, opinionated citizenry, and stimulating college of Carlisle. If the interruption of study was short when compared with the time lost from studies by modern citizen soldiers, there were correspondingly fewer benefits, since Robert received no G. I. Bill, and there is no pension claim by him or his widow in the National Archives pension files.

The next letter to the presidential uncle in Washington illustrates anew the close connection of Dickinson with the upper South during the early national period. Robert sent his letter to Washington by his college-mate, George L. Brent, a member of a prominent family of Virginia politicians, while the President's last letter to Carlisle had been conveyed by a "Mr. Forrest," perhaps Julius Forrest, class of 1815, son of James Madison's business agent in the District of Columbia. After promising to do all in his power to render Forrest's stay in Carlisle comfortable, Robert returned to the problem of his law studies, now prosecuted with renewed vigor as the end of his undergraduate days approached. He hoped to complete the study of the law in two years, and then move to New Orleans to practice where he would "have a greater prospect of succeeding in my profession, than in the state of Virginia, where there is but little litigation,

²³ Robert L. Madison to James Madison, Sept. 14, 1814, New York Public Library.

and that little monopolized by a few eminent practioners [sic].”²⁴ As was the case with so many of his neighbors and relatives, the lure of the Mississippi Valley was irresistible as young Madison compared the future of that limitless region with that of the already declining fortunes of the Virginia Piedmont. But New Orleans presented a special problem. The French civil law, based on Justinian’s Code rather than English Common Law, was in force in the new State of Louisiana. Robert found reading the French *Code Civil* a good exercise for perfecting his French, as well as a necessary basis for his proposed law practice in New Orleans. In his last extant letter from Carlisle written in March 1815, Robert reported he was reading “Justinian, with notes by judge Cooper,” since Justinian was “considered the Blackstone of the civil law.” It is apparent that Robert was prosecuting his law studies seriously, and that Cooper was the omni-competent mentor in the work. The President’s nephew summarized his pursuits and intentions in a way that befitted the dignity of a college senior of his day: “It is important that a young man should know his destined place of residence during the prosecution of his studies, as he might regulate them, to suit those courts, in which he would have to practice.”²⁵

In addition to the major problem of his legal studies, Robert dealt with a number of minor matters in his post-war letters from Carlisle. With a display of interest which must have warmed the always receptive heart of his Aunt Dolley, he asked his uncle to tell her of his inability to send her a promised poem. Also, he had been incapacitated much of the winter with “a rising” on his right side which prevented him from writing. Perhaps it is well that by this time Benjamin Rush had died, so there was no chance of sending Robert to Philadelphia to be bled to death as had

²⁴ Robert L. Madison to James Madison, Nov. 12, 1814. New York Public Library.

²⁵ Robert L. Madison to James Madison, March 7, 1815, New York Public Library.

possibly happened to his unfortunate brother Alfred four years earlier. The last words we have of the President's nephew from Carlisle are, appropriately, a tribute to his friend and teacher Judge Cooper, who, said Robert, was "well & very attentive to his students, [he] examines them every sunday upon what they read the preceding week." Just six months before the bitter struggle between Cooper and Atwater forced the college to close its doors, the "atheistical" Cooper was examining his law students on Sunday. This must have been a bitter pill for the pious Atwater, and perhaps is an indication of the gulf that separated him from the equally energetic, uncompromising Cooper.

At this point the story of Robert Madison fades into oblivion. He is recorded in the college records as a non-graduate, so presumably he did not complete the regular undergraduate course before the final commencement and departure of the faculty in September 1815.²⁶

A year after leaving college, in a move which must have cheered him, but which also tied him more closely to Virginia, Robert married Eliza Strachan of Petersburg, who, according to newspaper accounts of the wedding, was "beautiful and accomplished."²⁷ Apparently, too, his law study was insufficient to allow him to move to New Orleans as he desired so ardently, for his last known letter, written from Orange County two months before his uncle retired from the White House, is filled with the usual Virginia small talk of the day. The letter is most revealing because gone are the hopes and aspirations of the bright, forward-looking college days in Carlisle. Raising turkeys, a sick father, the price of corn and flour, local elections, a visit with grand-mama, and runaway slaves are the subjects of conversation. After

²⁶ Robert L. Madison to James Madison, Jan. 21, 1817, New York Public Library.

²⁷ The Richmond *Enquirer*, July 17, 1816, file in Virginia State Library. I am indebted to Mr. Robert L. Scribner for locating the material in the newspaper files of the State Library.

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this letter, which must have bored a young man who had thrilled to great oratory and sharpened his wits on the public and theoretical controversies of the day, the record becomes even more shadowy. A letter from Dolley Madison to her shiftless son, Payne Todd, in 1823 mentioned that Robert was "riding about anxiously soliciting votes,"²⁸ but the office sought and the result of the contest are unknown. Unless the Madison political machine had deteriorated utterly from the 1790's when Uncle James used to poll a unanimous vote in Orange County,²⁹ it is likely his nephew was successful in his quest. The final notice of Robert L. Madison, Dickinson College, Class of 1815, is a melancholy one in the *Richmond Enquirer* of February 23, 1828: "Died, on Saturday morning, the 9th of Feb., at the House of his father, Gen. Madison . . . Mr. Robert L. Madison, nephew of President Madison, aged 33 . . . He has left . . . two sons."³⁰

One of these sons, named for the father, had a long and distinguished career as a doctor and teacher at the Virginia Military Institute where he also served as personal physician for Gen. Robert E. Lee during the post-Appomattox years. The scholarly tradition in the family was continued by a grandson also of the same name, only recently deceased, who long served as a college President in North Carolina.

Indeed, the frustration which must have accompanied the failure to achieve career aspirations and the perhaps declining health leading to an early death, are an unfortunate part of the only known sordid aspect of Madison family life in Orange County. With his father dead and his brother busy in Washington, William Madison was the titular head of the Madison family in Orange County most of the year during the first decades of the 19th century. Details of estate settlement and farm manage-

²⁸ D. P. Madison to Payne Todd, Apr. 12, 1823, Dolley Madison Papers, Library of Congress.

²⁹ See Francis Taylor Diary, 1794, Virginia State Library.

³⁰ The *Richmond Enquirer*, Feb. 23, 1828, file in Virginia State Library.

ment crowd the few surviving letters to his brother. Supply wagons are dispatched from Orange to Fredericksburg and Richmond, the illness and death of a son and brother-in-law are reported, and the deceitfulness and negligence of Gideon Gooch, the business agent for the President's Montpelier estate, are revealed by brother William with the regret that "your pecuniary matters are not managed by some friend residing near your farms."³¹ Throughout, William seems to be beset with problems that bewilder and engulf him, a situation doubtless aggravated by the illness and death of so many of his children at an early age—four died between 1809 and 1814, at ages 14, 20, 22, and 23, and five more were to die in the 1820's of whom only Robert reached the 25th birthday.³² In what was perhaps a final effort to find the glory and honor to which he had always aspired, William Madison hinted to his brother at the close of the War of 1812 that he would like to trade his brigadier general's commission in the militia for a regular army appointment. Apparently nothing came of this, and the discharged General Madison returned home, perhaps as sick and discouraged as he had been when he walked halfway from Washington to Orange in a snow storm four years earlier.³³

In any case, driven almost to distraction by frustration and bereavement, we may imagine, William Madison undertook efforts in the decade of President Madison's death which ill befitted a Virginia gentleman. In a story that can be inferred but not proven, William Madison probably pressed pension claims for his service in the Revolutionary War far beyond the actual extent of his service. It is significant that these claims were not pushed

³¹ William Madison to James Madison, Oct. 23, 1810; Oct. 25, 1810; March 3, 1811, Princeton University Library.

³² Files of the Richmond *Enquirer*, Virginia State Library.

³³ William Madison to James Madison, Feb. 2, 1815, Indiana University Libraries and William Madison to James Madison, Mar. 3, 1811, Princeton University Library.

hard until after the death of James Madison in 1836, and the ex-President nowhere appears in the affidavits William presented in support of his claim.³⁴ Perhaps William knew his brother would not acquiesce in a maneuver with such fraudulent intent. In an instance of even greater dishonor, however, William Madison participated in a deceitful attempt following the ex-President's death to get Dolley Madison to pay him \$2,000 to clear up an undoubtedly non-existent debt of some thirty-five years standing owed him by his brother. The debt supposedly involved money due William as a result of the settlement of the estate of James Madison, Sr., and centered upon a bag of gold left by the father, which so William asserted, his eldest brother never divided with him or the other heirs. If the bizarre nature of the story were not enough to discredit it, the rigid insistence by President Madison throughout his life that his personal debts be paid promptly would make the claim incredible. In any event, William, along with his sole surviving son Ambrose, persuaded the guileless Dolley Madison to sign a paper agreeing to pay the \$2,000 debt if proof could be presented of its authenticity. Even the signature itself was obtained under pretensions of friendship to the widow, and was drawn in a clever way to grant, in legal terms, much more than Dolley meant to concede. Having obtained the signed paper, William Madison and his heirs used it to carry on ten years of litigation against Dolley Madison as the sole executrix of her husband's estate, until they were finally defeated by the testimony of all who knew the character of the various litigants, the deceitfully obtained paper notwithstanding.³⁵ Thus, the life of William Madison ended with an open attempt to defraud his sister-in-law, a stark testimony to the degradation of a life which

³⁴ Pension claim file of Brig. General William Madison, General Reference Section, National Archives.

³⁵ See various letters, briefs, statements, affidavits, etc., in the Dolley Madison Papers, 1836-46, Library of Congress.

had opened amid the flush of the revolutionary order which swept the Virginia Piedmont in the late 18th century.

Unfortunate as the immediate family situation seems to have been, nevertheless, the record of the relationship between the young man who studied at Dickinson College during the War of 1812, and his uncle who took time from heavy duties as War President to aid and comfort him is a revealing one for both the history of the College and the biography of James Madison. Dickinson College is shown to be an institution of unusual intellectual stimulation during the years Robert Madison studied there. The excitement the young student felt at the high level debate on political economy between Judge Cooper and Dr. Bollman is but one instance of this stimulation. Furthermore, Robert seems to have had a remarkable opportunity to undertake complex legal studies along with his undergraduate work, and certainly his devotion to the pedagogy of Judge Cooper represents the kind of fruitful teacher-pupil relationship that is the ideal of every educational institution. That this valuable experience was going on in the midst of severe disturbances and differences of opinion on the campus is likewise visible in the letters which went from Carlisle to Washington. These ruptures, which led to the dissolution of the college that prevented Robert from graduating, are as regrettable as the illness and frustration which reduced the family of William Madison to a similar decay. Indeed, the young student himself, thwarted in his vocational dreams by forces beyond his control and taken by death from his charming wife and two young children at the peak of young manhood, stands as a tragic figure whose claim to historical recognition rests on the connection his letters have made between a College and a President.

So far as the President is concerned, the record of his dealings with his nephew Robert is much the most revealing of his family relationships. Fated to be childless himself, James Madison

had only a step-son, John Payne Todd, who was always a trial and a burden to his mother and step-father because of his shiftlessness. Thus, it was to his numerous nieces and nephews that James Madison turned in exercising his paternal instincts. The record of his relationship with the children of Dolley Madison's sisters who lived at Montpelier for months at a time, is one of undeviating interest and affection. In his Will he made generous bequests to the more than thirty nieces and nephews who survived him. It is now apparent that in at least one instance, James Madison provided a parent's care for one of these young relatives. He boarded Robert Madison and paid for a private tutor during a period of preparation for college, he bore most or all of the young man's expenses at Dickinson, and he provided continuing care and counsel all during Robert's collegiate career. Thus, an important personal dimension is added to the understanding of a founding father who has too long been pictured as an aloof machine geared only to thinking about great questions of politics. As both Dickinson College and James Madison went on to renewed usefulness and reputation following the tormenting years of the second war with Great Britain, it is important to know that even in "the time of trouble" the College achieved rare success in challenging its students intellectually, and the President persevered in a display of personal warmth and interest of which history has often charged him of being incapable.

ALFRED VICTOR DU PONT, DICKINSONIAN

NORMAN B. WILKINSON

May 2, 1957

Norman B. Wilkinson, Ph.D.

Dr. Wilkinson's monumental BIBLIOGRAPHY OF PENNSYLVANIA HISTORY, a standard work long to be held in the grateful remembrance of historians, librarians and students, was begun as a member of the faculty of Muhlenberg College, and continued more actively during his years as Assistant State Historian, with the Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission. He was in this position when his WRITINGS ON PENNSYLVANIA HISTORY, compiled in collaboration with Arthur C. Bining and Robert L. Brunhouse, was published in 1946. The BIBLIOGRAPHY, his continuation and enlargement of this, appeared in 1957. Since 1954, Dr. Wilkinson has been Research Associate with the Eleutherian Mills-Hagley Foundation of Wilmington Delaware. This situation opened to him the archives of the du Pont family and plant, the primary source upon which this lecture is based. He is the author also of articles in AMERICAN HERITAGE, DELAWARE HISTORY, MISSISSIPPI VALLEY HISTORICAL REVIEW, MILITARY AFFAIRS, PENNSYLVANIA HISTORY, of which he is one of the editors, and the PENNSYLVANIA MAGAZINE OF HISTORY AND BIOGRAPHY.

ALFRED VICTOR DU PONT. DICKINSONIAN

THE decision had proven a wise one. So the father sat down one day and wrote these words to his closest friend back in the homeland:

Perhaps you may remember my comparison of the world to a piece of cheese; in your place I should not hesitate to put one of my eggs on the fresh new side where we live rather than keep them all on the rotten side that is called Europe. Pline, with his education and under our wings, would do well here. If before you send him to us, you have him study science—chemistry, and mechanics, it would be very helpful, . . . it is easy to find capital here to start an industry,—only knowledge is necessary.¹

Eleuthère Irénée du Pont could write with happy assurance after nine years' residence in America that this was the land of opportunity—the new side of the cheese.

The story of the du Ponts' departure from "the rotten side that is called Europe" nearly a decade earlier is the immigrant story—but with much drama in motivation and incident. The du Ponts were neither royalist exiles nor penniless migrants. Pierre Samuel du Pont de Nemours, head of the family, was a self-made man whose career epitomizes the man of eighteenth century enlightenment. He had progressed from watchmaker to economist, author, educator, printer, philosopher, inspector general of manufactures, member of the Estates General, and briefly president of the Council of Ancients in the revolutionary govern-

¹E. I. du Pont to P. N. Harmand, January 28, 1809, in B. G. du Pont (ed.), *Life of E. I. du Pont, 1771-1834*, 11 vols. (Newark, Del., 1923-1926), VIII, 147-148.

ment of France. Visionary and idealistic, he was thoroughly in sympathy with the demands for the reform of the Bourbon monarchy but he respected tradition and sought change with moderation. His ideal of government was the British system—a constitutional monarchy where the king reigned but did not rule.

Moderation was swept aside, however, in the radical turmoil of the Reign of Terror and in the stalemated and corrupt ineffectiveness of the Directory that followed. The elder du Pont was twice imprisoned; close to the guillotine on one occasion and almost deported to the penal colony of Cayenne on another. He escaped the latter in the pleading of Madame de Staël that he was an old harmless man—a plea that hurt his vanity—he was only in his fifties. At other times he was under house arrest, in hiding, or masquerading as an elderly physician to escape detection. Twice his printing establishment, in which his younger son Eleuthère assisted him, was wrecked on government orders. Many of his friends and associates had been even less fortunate—they were gone. Among them the brilliant Lavoisier who had taught Eleuthère the rudiments of powdermaking at the Arsenal in Paris. France had no further use for scientists! And France was no longer a hospitable place that offered a future for men of du Pont's talents and moderate outlook. He decided that he and his family would leave "the volcano" that was France.

Du Pont had many friends who were Americans, among them Franklin, Jefferson and Monroe. Lafayette was a close family friend. Du Pont's elder son Victor was in the French consular service stationed in Charleston and then New York. The father met Americans in France on government business, on private affairs, and agents trying to sell American lands. One of the last publications issued by Chez du Pont, his publishing house, was the multi-volumed *Travels in North America* by the observant Rochefoucauld-Liancourt. Eleuthère was reading galley proof

of this work in the months just prior to their departure from France. By these means father and son were well informed about this country well in advance of their decision to migrate. After a long conversation with a Colonel Fulton—possibly Robert Fulton, Irénée exclaimed to his wife:

Oh, how happy we would be, my Sophie, away from the volcano on which we live and established in the *promised* land.²

His first son, Alfred Victor, had just been born, in the spring of 1798, and these words of bright anticipation were as much a hope for his son's future as for his own.

The young father prepared himself for life in the new home. Not as a printer, his most recent occupation, nor as a powder-maker—that did not enter his mind at this time. For the "grand project" being planned by his father, Pierre Samuel, Eleuthère's greatest usefulness would be as a botanist. Uppermost in the elder du Pont's mind, a mind teeming with plans and alternatives, was the establishment of a colony somewhere in the back counties of Virginia or Kentucky. It would be a model, planned settlement founded on the principles of the French physiocrats, a philosophy of which du Pont was one of the most articulate exponents. "He who tills his own soil will be satisfied."

Agriculture would be the primary concern in this settlement of "Pontiana," but the crafts and small-scale industries would have a place. Extensive tracts of land surrounding the colony would be owned by the company the father organized in 1799, Du Pont Père, Fils et Cie.—Du Pont Father, Son and Company. As the colony grew these neighboring lands would be sold off at ever rising prices. This was the "Rural Society" that would need the talents of a trained botanist to derive the utmost benefit from the riches of nature that abounded on the American frontier. Or so it seemed when visualized from a study room in Paris.

² E. I. du Pont to Sophie du Pont, September 27, 1797, *ibid.*, IV, 71.

So Eleuthère, in the months prior to the family's departure, took a course in botany at the Jardin des Plantes—the botanical gardens in Paris. Ever serious minded, he never missed a lecture and kept copious notes “. . . so that they may be useful for my Sophie and her little ones.”³ When the time came to fill out his passport he listed his occupation as “botaniste”—a more innocuous vocation in wartime France than powdermaker or printer.

The du Pont entourage, thirteen in all, had a grueling crossing. Their vessel, the *American Eagle*, was a leaky, unseaworthy ship that had been seized by the French years earlier and had lain rotting at La Rochelle. Victor du Pont was instrumental in having it released. They were at sea three months; the winds were contrary, the crew a scurvy lot of thieving seamen, food ran short and the captain repeatedly got off course. Responding to the *Eagle's* distress signals, supplies and accurate bearings were twice given by passing English vessels. One can imagine the relief with which Eleuthère and Sophie stepped ashore at Newport, Rhode Island, on the first day of the year 1800, with their three children, Victorine 7, Evelina 4, and Alfred Victor, 1½, nestled safely in his father's arms. There we shall leave him for a time, but we shall come back to him when some years hence he is off to school—first to an academy in Germantown north of Philadelphia, then here at Dickinson studying under Thomas Cooper those subjects his father considered essential for a young industrialist to know. Meanwhile let us see what befell the du Pont family and the plans they had for life here in the “promised land.”

Thomas Jefferson greeted the du Ponts with a “. . . welcome . . . to our shore, where you will at least be free from some of those sources of disquietude which have surrounded you in Europe.” The vice president of the United States then cautioned against launching the settlement project. The times were bad,

³ E. I. du Pont to Sophie du Pont, May 13, 1799, *ibid.*, IV, 321.

there had been a great deal of speculation and land values were abnormally high; and there were Americans in this business who regarded every stranger as lawful prey. Du Pont should familiarize himself fully with the land situation. Possibly in another two or three years conditions would be more favorable.⁴ Reluctantly du Pont gave up his dream of a "Rural Society," and he and his sons turned to other pursuits.

Victor, elder son and former consular official, became a commission merchant in New York city where he handled foreign shipments, dealt in foreign exchange, and undertook purchasing assignments. But Victor was too affable and easygoing a person to succeed in business. In 1805 he failed when Napoleon's government refused to compensate him for expenses he had incurred in provisioning French troops and frigates in New York harbor. These forces were destined for the West Indies to be used against the negro uprisings led by Toussaint L'Ouverture.

Eleuthère had marked time for a number of months casting about for a gainful occupation. Tradition has it that in late summer of 1800 he was out hunting with a Frenchman, Colonel Louis Tousard, now Inspector of Artillery for the U.S. Army. They were dissatisfied with the expensive American-made powder they had bought. Here the idea was born—why not start a gunpowder factory and utilize the training he had had under Lavoisier! Using French methods and French machinery Eleuthère was certain he could make black powder of superior quality. This was the beginning of E. I. du Pont de Nemours and Company.

The du Pont story has been told through several media, in several books, a movie, and on the Cavalcade program. I do not wish to retread familiar paths, but a brief outline of the founding era is necessary in order for us to place young Alfred Victor in his proper niche.

On borrowed money—he did not have assets of his own

⁴Dumas Malone, (ed.), *Correspondence Between Thomas Jefferson and Pierre Samuel du Pont de Nemours*, pp. 3-4; *Life of E. I. du Pont*, V. 143-147.

sufficient to buy a single share in his own company—Eleuthère Irénée built his black powder mills on the Brandywine four miles above Wilmington. It took him nearly two years to complete the works that cost \$57,000, \$20,000 more than anticipated. Much of the machinery was French made; the mills were patterned after those at Essonne where du Pont had briefly worked, and the latest French methods were followed. The willingness of the French government powder officials to be so helpful can be partly explained on the basis of friendship, but also because they foresaw that these new American mills could be a weapon to be used against the old enemy, England. Nearly all powder imported into the U.S. came from England, and by aiding du Pont make powder of equal or better quality to supply American needs the English would lose one of their best markets.

The first decade, until 1812, was a difficult uphill struggle. The first powder sold the government was used by the Navy in the Tripolitan War of 1805. But government orders were slow in coming and not very large. Jefferson's passive neutralist policies could not sanction stockpiling munitions. The president did, however, praise the powder he had bought for his own hunting and blasting at Monticello as excellent. Du Pont had to battle rival powdermakers who tried to entice his workmen away and steal his equipment. There was prejudice in both trade and government circles because of his French origin—noted particularly when Franco-American relations were strained due to Napoleon's maritime policies. The du Pont name did not appear in any local advertising for two years after he began his business.

The War of 1812 gave an impetus to the powder business and numerous other industries. The opportunity for Americans to produce more and import less was a gospel preached by du Pont. With his aid he got his brother Victor to establish a woolen mill across the Brandywine which they named Louviers. On his own farm on the hill above the powder mills he raised large

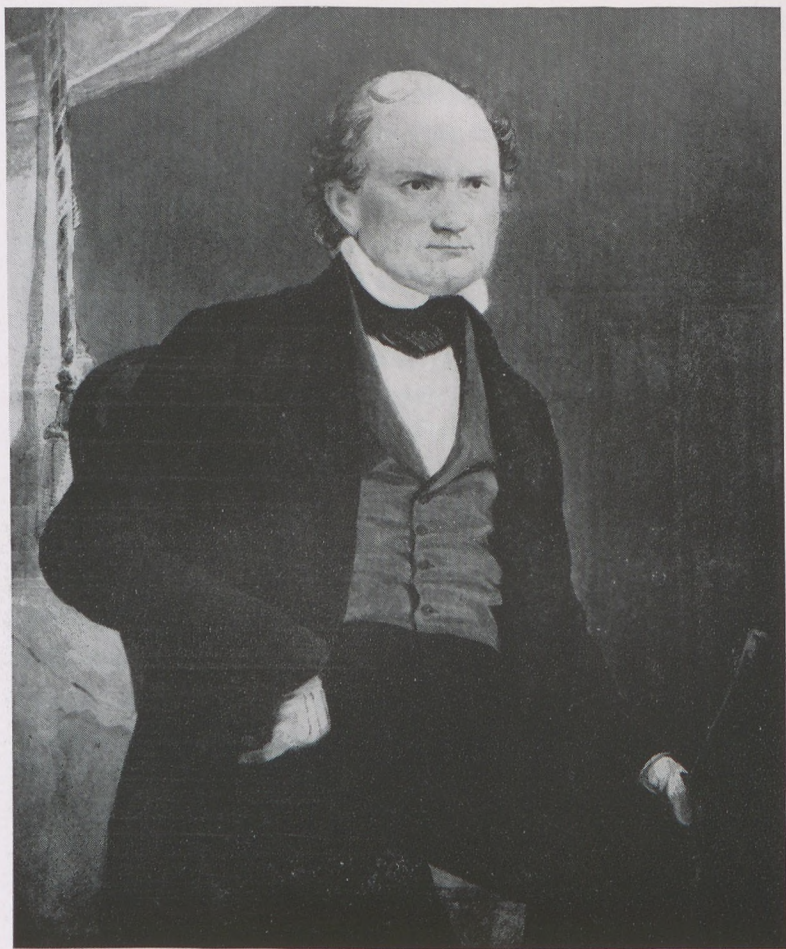


Photo courtesy of Eleutherian Mills-Hagley Foundation

Alfred Victor du Pont

From a small painting of ca. 1845 by an unidentified artist. Reproduced with the kind permission of the owner, Mrs. J. Simpson Dean.

flocks of Merino sheep and he induced others to do the same as sources of quality wool. He underwrote his bookkeeper's venture into a cotton spinning mill at the lower end of the powder yard—the present Hagley Museum of early industries. And he was instrumental in setting up his brother-in-law with several partners in a tannery using new methods. He tried to attract new industries to the Brandywine. He was a protectionist when the tariff issues were before Congress, an ardent Henry Clay man supporting aid to industries, improved communications and a sound banking system. He helped decide the route of the Delaware and Chesapeake Canal; and in the 1826's he served as a director of the Second Bank of the United States. The community where many of his workmen lived downstream from the mills came to be known as Henry Clay village; the cotton mill was named Henry Clay, and his sons' taste in cigars favored a brand—Henry Clay.

The impression may have been given that this first du Pont industrialist had become a wealthy man. His estate had grown. He had a comfortable, commodious home, at times bursting with his seven children and their kinfolk whom they often entertained. Farmlands and orchard bordered the mills that could now produce over half a million pounds of powder annually. Markets were expanding as powder was used in quarrying, mining, canal and railroad construction, and on the pioneer frontier moving westward. But he had borrowed to found the business and to enlarge it, and throughout his life he was constantly concerned with paying off debts falling due. A visitor once made the remark, "Mr. du Pont is a man of great capital, which may disappear overnight." On more than one occasion serious explosions almost destroyed his establishment. Not until three years after his death were all his obligations cleared. This task fell largely upon his eldest son Alfred Victor.

We last left Alfred as a baby in his father's arms as he

thankfully stepped ashore at Newport, R. I. on New Year's Day, 1800. His boyhood on the Brandywine is glimpsed principally through the letters written by his parents. The du Pont home was only five miles from Wilmington but 150 years ago that was virtual isolation for youngsters. Alfred's playmates were his sisters and brothers and the children of the powder workmen—the Murphy's, the Callahans, the Boyds, the Harkins, the Flanagan's—all Irish families recently arrived. When Uncle Victor's family settled on the opposite shore he had some cousins with whom to play. Madame du Pont was a devoted mother giving the children the time she could spare from running an enlarging household and directing the feeding and housing and laundry of the single workmen who lived in the company dormitory. She may have been the first company bookkeeper for some of the earliest records appear to be in a feminine hand.

The woodlands surrounding the home and powder yard invited exploration by growing youngsters. Their curiosity about bugs, butterflies, animals of all kinds, snakes—of which there were plenty—shells, leaves, flowers and minerals, was encouraged by the parents who helped them with their collections. Alfred had a keen interest in mineralogy; his father brought home new specimens from his frequent business trips. On a New England trip he wrote from Providence, “. . . I spent the evening gathering minerals for Alfred, which is not very difficult here, where the bones of the earth are very near the skin.”⁵ Barns and stables and sheepfold were part of their playground, so they were familiar with animals and had special pets of their own—Caesar and Rosetta—the dogs; a catspaw snake; “Little Red Cat,” “little white cock,” and Azore and Zelia, two pet fawns. As they came of age when they could safely handle a knife the children no doubt helped cut and peel willow branches in the spring of the

⁵E. I. du Pont to Victorine du Pont, July 16, 1821, in *Life of E. I. du Pont*, XI, 38.

year that were burned into charcoal for the making of du Pont black powder.

Alfred's early education was gained at home from his mother and father and elder sister Victorine. There may have been a private tutor now and then from Wilmington or Philadelphia. In the family circle French was spoken so Alfred grew up in a bilingual household. French and American newspapers and journals were read. On the book shelves were Grimshaw's *History of England*, Aesop's *Fables*, *Receuil Choisi* (historical anecdotes), *Rosamond*, *The Good Aunt*, some Latin books and an early prototype of Dr. Spock's best seller—*The Parents' Assistant*, two volumes.⁶ Three publications of special import to the father were Niles' *Weekly Register*, like the *Wall Street Journal* an indispensable aid to men in business; the *Archives of Useful Knowledge* edited by James Mease, M. D. of Philadelphia, and *The Emporium of all the Arts and Sciences*, edited by the professor of chemistry at Dickinson, Thomas Cooper.

In 1811 Alfred, at the age of 13, was not yet ready to absorb Mr. Cooper's lectures in chemistry. So for four years he attended Mount Airy College north of Philadelphia where the curriculum was a classical one along with some stiff work in mathematics taught by a Reverend Mr. Brosius, companion of Prince Gallitzin, and later to move on to Harvard University. The training was sound. It pleased the father who recommended Mount Airy College to several friends and business associates as a good school to which they should send their sons.

E. I. du Pont wanted his son to assist him in the powder business and to succeed him as its director. He did not scorn the liberal arts, but the best preparation for a young manufacturer of explosives was in the sciences. The father was well read in many areas of science—we know the books he bought and borrowed, his associations with such learned groups as the American

⁶ Letters to Henry du Pont from Sophie and Victorine du Pont, January 23, 28, 30, 1823, unpublished letters, Longwood Library.

Philosophical Society, and his correspondence with several of its members. And he had been a student of Lavoisier. He liked what he read of the practical applications of science to industry and manufacturing that appeared in Cooper's *Emporium*, and he approved the judge's philosophy of education:

We teach our youth in vain unless we enable them to keep pace with the improvements of the day.⁷

Cooper, in his opinion, was the man most eminently qualified to teach chemistry to his son. It is highly probable that the father read Cooper's introductory lecture, a masterly survey of the history of chemistry and an appeal for its recognition in the practical arts. This had been printed and widely circulated. If the elder du Pont had read or had had reported to him some of the principles of education as set forth by President Jeremiah Atwater in his inaugural address of 1809, he would have been doubly reassured that Dickinson was the right college for Alfred. Natural philosophy, astronomy, and chemistry, especially the last, said President Atwater,

are sciences which I should always wish to see claiming a conspicuous place in education and exhibited for students as worth the most diligent study of all . . . The sciences are viewed as important in other countries and governments, even monarchical ones, and are they to be considered of no importance as relating to a republican government? . . . We live under the full blaze of the gospel and the meridian lustre of the sun of science.⁸

But Atwater was soon to utter words in a different tenor—words that would make every parent pause and reconsider before entering his son at Dickinson. He had not been in Carlisle very long before he damned this old frontier and barracks town as

literally & emphatically satan's seat. There pride and irreligion have long been enthroned and enjoyed undisputed dominion . . .

⁷ "The Education of Alfred Victor du Pont," typed manuscript, Longwood Library.

⁸ J. Atwater, *An Inaugural Address* . . . 1809.

The higher class here have been little better than infidels.

Rich sinners wallowed in "the pleasures of high-life, of parade, of the table and ball chamber." The poor were intemperate and immoral. During the first six months of his presidency there had been two duels, a suicide and a murder.⁹ Collegiate delinquency was apparently very contagious in those years; I believe Princeton students had burned down the president's home not long before this time. The habits of Dickinson students were deplorable. They did "what was right in their own eyes—spending their time at taverns and in the streets, lying in bed always till breakfast, & never at the College but at the time of lecture . . . & caring nothing for any power which the faculty ever exercised." Atwater applied, with faculty cooperation no doubt, some stern remedial measures to this college community, and in a year's time Benjamin Rush rejoiced that his creation was no longer a "son of sorrow," but a "child of laughter to his heart."¹⁰ President Atwater could well pride himself upon the salutary effects of the application of his New England discipline.

The span of rejoicing ended, however, when the college trustees, against Atwater's wishes, named Thomas Cooper as professor of chemistry in 1811. This critical, contentious and outspoken Unitarian, who even dared to criticize Christianity, would "poison the minds of youth." But Cooper soon proved popular both as teacher and as person with his students. Chemistry was a new and fascinating field; Cooper was a stimulating teacher who encouraged their experimenting; he invited "bull" sessions, and he doctored their minor illnesses with Madeira wine. An unbeatable combination, certainly worthy of a "chairing" ceremony or a student accolade at class day festivities.

In the six months just prior to coming to Dickinson Alfred

⁹ Whitfield J. Bell, "Thomas Cooper at Dickinson College, 1811-1815," in *Journal of the History of Medicine*, VIII, 71.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 72.

seems to have taken some "prep" or brush up work under the tutelage of Enoch and Evan Lewis of New Garden, Pennsylvania. There was a New Garden Academy in Chester County, not far distant from the du Pont home, at this time. We have little information on this interim education except what a tuition bill reveals. For six months boarding and tuition Mr. du Pont paid \$75 plus \$4.83 for Alfred's stationery.¹¹ If this last was for writing home, none of Alfred's letters of this period has yet come to our attention.

Entering college in 1816 was not preceded by the several hurdles and screening devices that have become part of the college entrance ritual in our time. Hence we cannot check back on Alfred's entrance or aptitude performances to see whether or not he was a student of some promise. But he had an observant and articulate grandfather, du Pont de Nemours, who had returned from France in 1815 to live out his last years with Irénée's family at Eleutherian Mills on the Brandywine. As Alfred, with his father and two sisters, who went along for the ride, set off in the family coach for Carlisle, fifty leagues away, in mid-May, 1816, this was the grandfather's prophecy:

Alfred will not be what is called a scholar, but he will be a chemist, mathematician and mechanic. These are the most important actual sciences in our position. He has a great deal of ingenuity, skill and pontique strength of will.¹²

On another occasion the grandfather commented that Alfred had much ingenuity for mechanics, the practical sciences and useful arts. He possessed a strong and silent will.

At the age of forty he will be a man of lofty and powerful judgement.¹³

¹¹ Receipted Bill, Winterthur Manuscript Collection.

¹² Du Pont de Nemours to his wife, May 29, 1816, *Miscellaneous Letters*, No. 43, p. 471, Longwood Library.

¹³ Du Pont de Nemours to his wife, November 15, 1816, *ibid.*, No. 70, pp. 717-718.

By coincidence Alfred did become president of the powder company in his fortieth year. But this is running ahead of our story.

With stops at Lancaster, Middletown and Harrisburg, the du Pont entourage reached Carlisle on a Sunday afternoon in May after two days on the road. (I drove it today in a little less than three hours). A satisfactory program of instruction was decided upon, though du Pont mentions no other subject than chemistry under Cooper when writing of these arrangements. Alfred's living arrangements were more difficult to settle upon. Dickinson students, it would seem, had backslid into habits of sloth and indifference since President Atwater's earlier efforts at reform. Listen to du Pont's comment to his wife:

Judge Cooper, who lives in the college, wanted Alfred to be there too and I regretfully consented because I saw nothing else to do. Fortunately I found out in time that it would be very bad for his work as well as for his recreation—he would have had to spend his evenings and Sundays in very bad company. I made a compromise arrangement that will avoid those two difficulties and yet give all the time he needs for study. He will go to the college in the early morning, have his breakfast and dinner there and stay all day; in the evening he will return for supper and for the night in a private house, where he has a very nice room, with nice people who will take good care of him and with whom he will spend his Sundays. Part of the time he will be with the family of our old correspondent, James Givin, who are very wholesome and respected people here. . . . Their son, who is Alfred's age, studies at the College, and will be a good friend for Alfred and prevent his making unfortunate acquaintances, as he might easily have done.¹⁴

These are the words of a loving and conscientious parent determined to see that his son got a good start on his college career in favorable surroundings and with the right kind of companions. As an alumnus some years later (1845) Alfred made a gift of some books to the Belles Lettres Society, one of which bore the title *A Father's Gift to His Children*, 2 volumes, by

¹⁴ E. I. du Pont to Sophie du Pont, May 21, 1816, in *Life of E. I. du Pont*, X, 150-151.

William Mavor, published in 1815. It is rather a nice thought that the father may have presented this to Alfred upon his entrance into the collegiate world. A second gift was a chemistry book by Thomas Ewell, M. D., a man who had gone into the powder business about 1810 and had become a strong competitor of du Pont's for government business during the War of 1812. James Givin was a merchant here in Carlisle who sold du Pont powder; his son, John S. Givin, was in the class of 1817, a year ahead of Alfred. The younger Givin became a physician and died in 1825. Other associates of Alfred were James E. Madison of Virginia, President Madison's nephew, and John Winebrenner, founder of the Church of God.

Alfred's stay at Dickinson was less than six months duration, from May to September, 1816, when the college closed. As we may know, this was brought on by the feud between President Atwater and Professor Cooper which culminated in the resignation of both and of the greater part of the faculty. We have none of Alfred's letters to his parents—if he wrote any—during this semester. We can glimpse a little of the intellectual fare he was absorbing from the "Minutes of the Belles Lettres Society" and from its record of books circulated, which your librarian, Mr. Sellers, has kindly made available to me. In June Alfred was unanimously accepted into that society upon nomination by Martin Ewing, a Maryland youth who was elected president at this meeting. It would be interesting to know if Alfred, French born and with French associations, participated in the debate on the question "Was it Proper for the Allied Powers to Interfere in Placing Louis 18th upon the Throne of France," that the members held five days later. Dickinson students settled that issue in the negative despite Castlereagh, Metternich and Tsar Alexander!

For the next meeting du Pont was one of a committee that framed the issue for debate, "Is an Extorted Oath Obligatory?" Here they were whetting their philosophical teeth on a contentious

bone that had troubled men for ages, but one to which our more recent legislative bodies in their august wisdom gave quick and arbitrary answer. The conclusion of the Belles Lettres members was just the opposite.

Du Pont was elected president at the July meeting when the society debated, "Was Brutus Justifiable in Murdering Julius Caesar?" The decision was in the negative. Seven years before President Monroe answered the question for them, Dickinson students argued whether "It Would be Wise and Just for the United States to Declare for the Independence of South America and Assist Her to Obtain It?" We gather Alfred took a lively part in this discussion both on philosophical grounds and the fact that Latin America was a newly-opening market for the sale of American-made gunpowder. Alfred was late for the August meeting—maybe the heat—as a consequence he was fined 6¼ cents for being three minutes tardy in opening the debate on the question, "Should the Rate of Interest on Money be Established by Law?" This subject was very pertinent for it was an era of wildcat state and private banking, during the interim of the death of the First Bank of the United States and the creation of the Second. The decision was in the affirmative; the business community needed the stability that a fixed loan rate would supply.

Early in September Alfred applied for and received a diploma from the Belles Lettres Society. The last record shows that he had paid into the Society the sum of \$5.56½ during his membership.

Of the classroom instruction we have no inkling, but in view of Alfred continuing as a student of Cooper's in Philadelphia after both had left Dickinson, it is certain that both father and son were satisfied with the instruction in chemistry. Some of the books that Alfred read while here give us some idea of his interests—or what his professors were requiring. The first books he checked out were six volumes of chemistry, two by Accum, and four by Thompson. These were followed by three volumes

of Thompson's—presumably another Thompson—*History*. In July he found time to peruse a volume of *Naval Sketches*—his cousin was to become Admiral Samuel Francis du Pont—and two volumes of *Scottish Chiefs* and four volumes of *Phedora* carried him midway through August when he became interested in two volumes of *Female Biography*. More manly fare followed with *McFingal*, *Mariners' Chronicle*, *Lord of the Isles*, and *Castle Rackrent*. He squeezed in a volume of *Select Plays* and some *Chinese Tales* before topping off this literary repast with *Roderick Random* and *Don Quixote*. As every college student and alumnus, know, it is one thing to check out books and another to read them! If young Alfred read all these that I have named in his five months at Dickinson he read a good deal more in this span than I suspect many a student of today reads in his entire four years at college. With this we take leave of Dickinson with Alfred and Dr. Cooper and journey to Philadelphia. The college ceased operations until 1818.

Alfred needed a vacation, so he returned to the Brandywine for a few weeks. On a business trip to Philadelphia in early October his father met Judge Cooper who requested that Alfred come at once. He needed an assistant for the lectures and experiments he was offering at the University of Pennsylvania, where he had been named professor of chemistry and mineralogy. Alfred responded with alacrity, bought himself some new clothes, and here began a master-apprentice relationship that served him well as du Pont's chemist in later years. It appears, if grandfather du Pont de Nemours was correct, that teacher and pupil did not entirely sever their connections with Carlisle. Of Cooper, he noted,

He gives courses in both cities. Alfred will serve as his operator; that is the best way to learn.¹⁵

¹⁵ Du Pont de Nemours to his wife, October 16, 1816, Miscellaneous Letters, No. 66, p. 677, Longwood Library.

Throughout all of 1817 Alfred assisted and studied under Cooper at the University and at Cooper's home. It was not an easy program. He had to "stretch" to grasp all that the judge was expounding and demonstrating. His grandfather made this wry comment about his difficulties:

Alfred is at the home of the chemist Cooper, distilling his head in Alembics and Retorts, and breaking it against all the mineral-ogical stones.¹⁶

College vacation periods came later in the year a century and more ago. Cooper and Alfred worked and taught right through the hot summer months of 1817 until late August when they took a three-month respite until late November. There is reason to believe that E. I. du Pont planned to have Alfred go to France for further study but a series of misfortunes made this impossible. The grandfather, du Pont de Nemours, died in August of 1817; an impatient shareholder, a member of the family, began legal proceedings to collect dividends she claimed were due to her; and in March, 1818, occurred a devastating explosion in the powder factory. It happened the day after St. Patrick's Day, a day liquidly celebrated by the Brandywine Irishmen. Over thirty persons were killed and nearly all the mills leveled. Du Pont's capital had virtually disappeared overnight. Alfred was needed at home to assist in the re-building, and salvaging the business.

At the age of twenty his formal education ceased; whether to him it was occasion for regret, or relief, we do not know. It was only in his last years, 1854 to be exact, that Alfred commented on the quality of the education he had received. He compared it with that of his youngest brother Alexis:

Alexis . . . received an education far superior to that given me, in this our father was right, his means were more ample and he wished Alexis to have . . . the best that could be had.¹⁷

¹⁶ Du Pont de Nemours to his wife, July 1, 1817, *ibid.*, No. 93, p. 5.

¹⁷ Allan J. Henry (ed.), *Life of Alexis Irénée du Pont*, 2 vols. (Philadelphia, 1945), II, 192.

The career of Alfred du Pont as a powdermaker, and as president of E. I. du Pont de Nemours & Company is a chapter to be told at another time after more research has been done in his own and related papers. Tonight we have attempted to sketch his early life, with special attention to his education and his short stay at Dickinson College. It was the presence of Cooper on the faculty that brought him here, and it was Cooper's applications of theoretical chemistry to the practical needs of men that was the core of Alfred's training. The du Pont Company did not begin to diversify for many years after Alfred left Dickinson, but the spirit that came to demand "Better Things for Better Living Through Chemistry" was the same incentive that brought him here to learn all he could from the inquiring mind and effective teaching of Thomas Cooper.

Though not completed formally Alfred's education equipped him as chemist, millwright and mechanic to ease his father's tasks as head of an expanding business. In his own regime as its president he improved the processes of powdermaking; he converted to new means of power, from water wheels to turbines, and he developed safer methods of transporting gunpowder.

Though our study has barely touched upon him as an employer, his relations with his workmen and their families with whom he had grown up were friendly and understanding. Work in the mills was dangerous, though sons often followed their fathers. The powdermaking community was isolated and almost self-contained; and when tragedy or misfortune struck it was to the du Ponts the workmen instinctively turned for help. It was a paternalism that went beyond providing essentials and security through homes and pensions. Alfred acted as guardian, settled estates, encouraged and aided youngsters ambitious for an education, and gave good advice and loans to those of his workmen who went westward in the 1840's and 1850's to set up homesteads in the mid-west.

Alfred had a high tradition to uphold. It had begun when his own father, as a youth of thirteen, had been counseled by the elder du Pont de Nemours:

Remember my son, I have told you often, that no privilege exists that is not inseparably bound to a duty.

When his father had achieved a degree of success as an enterprising business man again there had come from du Pont de Nemours, *philosophe*, this credo:

All capacity is a trust. To labor for one's self—is that merit? For one's family—is that a trial? There is no animal, even of the lowest order, that does not do as much. To work for one's country is the beginning of improvement and dignity; that is like the Beaver, the Bee and the Ant. To work for humanity, for our fellow beings—that is the duty of Heroes, of true Philosophers—of Angels. The Eternal Being is unceasingly employed for the Universe and his goodness smiles on his creatures of inferior intellect who seek to please Him by devoting all the faculties He has given them to the general welfare, which is more noble, more fraternal than any private interests.

Let us be among men a race apart—that the world may say *The Du Ponts de Nemours* as they say The Catos, the Aristides, the Marcus Aureliuses.¹⁸

¹⁸ Du Pont de Nemours to E. I. du Pont, July 10, 1812, in *Life of E. I. du Pont*, IX, 46-47.

ROGER BROOKE TANEY
and the BANK WAR

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Photo by James F. Steinmetz

ROGER BROOKE TANEY

From the miniature of about 1845 by an unidentified artist. Given by Taney to his friend and neighbor, Marian Campbell (Mrs. Samuel L. Gouverneur, Jr.). Gift of Boyd Lee Spahr to the Dickinsoniana Collection, 1959.

ROGER BROOKE TANEY *and the* BANK WAR

I HARDLY need remind such an audience as this that one function of the historian, to borrow the thought of the distinguished Von Ranke, is to depict the past as it really was. Von Ranke's attitude toward the gathering, sifting, and objective display of the facts is one to which any reputable historian would readily subscribe. But it is not, again I hardly need say, the whole of the story. The rest of the story has to do with relationships, with patterns, and depends for its telling upon judgment about meaning and significance. The whole story requires, in short, that we amend Von Ranke's desideratum to something like the following: the historian maximizes his usefulness if he is able to display the relationship between a past that really was and significant developments which flowed from that past to help make the present what it really is! Dr. Wing,¹ who has forgotten more Von Ranke than I ever knew, will, I am sure, pardon this brief excursion into methodology. I know he would agree with me that history is a continuum along which the meaningful past flows into the meaningful present. And the purpose of the excursion, anyway, is merely to highlight the

¹Dr. Herbert Wing, Jr., Professor of History at Dickinson College, who introduced the speaker.

nature of my talk this evening. I do not pretend to have discovered any very important new facts concerning the subject under discussion. *Some* new facts, to be sure, have recently thrown light on Roger B. Taney's role in the Bank War. During 1958 Prof. Carl B. Swisher of Johns Hopkins University published Taney's famed "Bank War Manuscript" in the *Maryland Historical Magazine*.² But he had previously quoted at liberal length from that document in his outstanding biography of Taney.³ The summer before last my wife and I discovered a seventy-page manuscript in Taney's handwriting which also deals with the Bank War, but in its local rather than its national setting, and this too appeared last year in the pages of the same Journal.⁴ These new facts, however, are of far less interest and importance than the varying ways in which it is possible to evaluate the significance of Taney's part in the Bank War. It is the larger problem of interpretation that I shall mainly consider this evening. . . . But first let me introduce the leading character of the play.

Roger Brooke Taney was born in southern Maryland in the year 1777. His forebears appear to have emigrated from England as indentured servants at about the time of the Restoration. Members then of the Church of England they later embraced Roman Catholicism. The family's social and economic status also underwent change, for before long the Taney's were numbered among the tobacco plantation and slave-owning aristocracy of Southern Maryland. Unfortunately for younger sons, of whom Roger was one, the family estate passed intact from father to eldest son. Roger's father Michael did, however, see that his

² Carl B. Swisher, ed., "Roger B. Taney's 'Bank War Manuscript,'" *Maryland Historical Magazine* (June and Sept. 1958).

³ Carl B. Swisher, *Roger B. Taney* (N.Y., 1935)

⁴ Stuart Bruchey, ed., "Roger Brooke Taney's Account of His Relations with Thomas Ellicott in the Bank War," *Maryland Historical Magazine* (March and June 1958).

younger sons were provided with a liberal education and with the means of studying for a profession.⁵

Of Taney's youth we know little more than that with which he himself provided us in 1854 when, at the age of 77 and conscious, as he put it, that his life would "form a part of the history of the country," he drew up a sketch of his early years.⁶ According to Swisher, he was "a slender, flat-chested youngster, apparently impetuous and hot-tempered like his father, with a physique too frail to house a stormy disposition. On the other hand he had, or was to develop, a nature warmly sympathetic, like that of his mother" Monica, daughter of a southern Maryland planter named Roger Brooke.⁷

Taney's early education was highly irregular. The closest school was three miles distant and was superintended by a "well-disposed but ignorant old man, who professed to teach reading, writing, and arithmetic as far as the rule of three." His schoolbooks were a speller and the Bible. The youth was later boarded at a country grammar school, then taught by private tutors in the Taney home. In 1792, at the age of 15, he entered Dickinson College.

Even as an elderly man, Taney vividly recalled that the journey from southern Maryland to Carlisle, at that time the center of a Presbyterian community of no more than 2,000 souls, "was no small undertaking."⁸ "We embarked," he said, "on board one of the schooners employed in transporting produce and goods between the Patuxent River and Baltimore, and, owing to unfavorable winds, it was a week before we reached our port of destination; and, as there was no stage or any other public

⁵ Swisher, *Taney*, pp. 3-12.

⁶ Reprinted in Samuel Tyler, *Memoir of Roger Brooke Taney, LL.D* (Baltimore, 1872), pp. 1-95. Except where otherwise noted, the narrative of Taney's early life through his graduation from Dickinson College is based upon Tyler, pp. 27-55.

⁷ Swisher, *Taney*, p. 9.

⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 16.

conveyance between Baltimore and Carlisle, we were obliged to stay at an inn until we could find a wagon returning to Carlisle, and not too heavily laden to take our trunks and allow us occasionally to ride in it. This we at length accomplished, and in that way proceeded to Carlisle, and arrived safely, making the whole journey from our homes in about a fortnight. And what made the whole journey more unpleasant was that we were obliged to take, in specie, money enough to pay our expenses until the next vacation." In comparison with other "hazards of travel," Taney says, robbery did not then rank very high. The "difficulties of the journey were so great" that he went home only twice during his three years at the College, walking on both occasions from Carlisle to Baltimore.

In 1792, the year of Taney's matriculation, Dickinson numbered 65 students and a faculty of 4—two "Doctors" (Charles Nisbet and Robert Davidson) and two "Professors" (James McCormick and Charles Huston). Dr. Nisbet, a Presbyterian minister from Scotland, had been chosen head of the college by Dr. Benjamin Rush, the leader among the founders. He is described by Swisher as "a brilliant man, a master of many languages and learned in their literatures, and an excellent teacher."⁹ Taney fondly recalled "many a pleasant evening" spent at Dr. Nisbet's house. "He did not worry or fatigue me by grave and solemn lectures and admonitions," Taney wrote. "But although his conversation was always intended, as I afterwards saw, for my benefit and instruction, yet it did not seem so at the time. It was cheerful and animated, full of anecdote and of classical allusions, and seasoned with lively and playful wit. The class under his immediate instruction always became warmly and affectionately attached to him; yet, if he saw conduct that merited reproof, his sarcasm was sometimes bitter, and cut deep at the time. But I never saw it used towards a

⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 16-17; Tyler, *Memoir*, pp. 38-43.

pupil unless he deserved it." Dr. Nisbet taught classes in Ethics, Logic, Metaphysics, and Criticism. Dr. Davidson, the Vice-Principal was described by Taney as an unpopular teacher because of his formality, solemnity, and precision. Lecturing on History, Natural Philosophy, and Geography, he was, Taney says, "always the pedagogue in school and out of school." Yet he was not, Taney kindly adds, "harsh or ill-natured." Dr. McCormick and his wife, with whom Taney and approximately eight other students boarded, "were as kind to us as if they had been our parents." This Professor of Mathematics "was unwearied in his attentions to us in our studies, full of patience and good-nature, and sometimes seemed distressed when, upon examining a pupil, he found him not quite as learned as he was himself." The province of Charles Huston, the fourth Professor, was Latin and Greek. Taney remembered him as an "accomplished . . . scholar who was happy in his mode of instruction. And when he saw that a boy was disposed to study, his manner to him was that of a companion and friend, aiding him in his difficulties." Under these professors, he says: "I studied closely, was always well prepared in my lessons, and while I gladly joined my companions in their athletic sports and amusements, I yet found time to read a great deal beyond the books we were required to study." His life at Dickinson, he concludes, "was, taken altogether, a pleasant one." He brought it to a close by giving the Valedictorian address in 1795.

Taney's achievements in college certainly entitle him to a place among the most distinguished Dickinsonians. The question of his rank among the distinguished Americans of the 19th century can be approached by outlining some of the leading events of a long life subsequent to his graduation.¹⁰ He began

¹⁰ The narrated events in Taney's life following his graduation from Dickinson College can most clearly be substantiated by consulting the classified entries beneath the name R. B. Taney in the index to Swisher's *Taney*.

the next year, 1796, to study law in Annapolis, and was admitted to the bar three years later. In that same year, 1799, he was elected to the Maryland House of Delegates, only to be defeated for reelection in 1800. In 1801 he took up residence in Frederick, Maryland, a little town of some 3,000 people, which was to be his home for more than twenty years. There, in 1806, he married Anne Key, sister of Francis Scott Key, a union which would be blessed by the birth of seven children, six of them girls. During his years in Frederick Taney continued actively to participate in politics as a member of the Federalist Party. He strongly supported the War of 1812, however, despite the defection of large numbers of his fellow Federalists, particularly in New England. Indeed, the later publication of letters in which Andrew Jackson denounced the disloyal wing of the Federalist Party was of key importance in attracting Taney to the General's banner.

Following the War, Taney won a seat in the Maryland State Senate, and served therein for five years, from 1816 to 1821. In 1823, at the age of 46, he moved to Baltimore, where his rising reputation as a lawyer led to his being named Attorney General of Maryland. Abandoning politics for a brief time after his removal to the port city he reentered the arena as a supporter of Jackson's unsuccessful candidacy in 1824. Four years later he again gave his energies to the campaign to elect Old Hickory. In 1831, President Jackson named him Attorney General of the United States. Two years later, in the midst of the Bank War, the President appointed him Secretary of the Treasury. In 1836, finally, Taney became Chief Justice of the United States Supreme Court, a position he was to hold until his death in 1864, at the age of 87.

There can be little doubt that the proper measure of the historical significance of Taney's long life must rest upon an assessment of his contribution to American constitutional law. Professor Carl B. Swisher's excellent *Life of Taney*, and the

same author's forthcoming more concentrated study of Taney as jurist, will provide the best materials for this assessment. Yet we do not concern ourselves with the insignificant when we turn our attention to Taney's role in the Bank War. For, in the judgment of Swisher, the Bank War was, "With the possible exception of the part [Taney] played in the decision in the Dred Scott Case . . . the outstanding experience of his mature years," "and many of his conceptions of constitutional law which were [later] applied from the bench were worked out or modified in the midst [of it]."¹¹ Nor was the Bank War of deep significance to Taney alone. One of the major political and economic conflicts of American history, it continues to attract the avid attention of scholars. Recent months have seen the publication of at least two articles on the subject, by Harold J. Plous, and by Thomas P. Govan.¹² The last dozen years have seen Pulitzer prizes awarded to works, by Arthur Schlesinger, Jr., and by Bray Hammond, in which the Bank War lies at or near the center of attention.¹³ Like murderers returning to the scene of a crime, scholars revisit those dramatic events of the early 1830's, agreeing indeed that *crime* there was, while differing either as to the identity of the victim, or on the problem of whose knife it was that felled mighty Caesar. Or perhaps I should say "Frankenstein," since the word "monster" was the favorite epithet hurled by the Jacksonians at the Bank.

The Bank in question was, of course, the Bank of the United States, specifically the Second Bank of the United States. For

¹¹ Swisher, ed. "Roger B. Taney's 'Bank War Manuscript,'" June 1958, p. 104; Swisher, *Taney*, p. 160.

¹² Harold J. Plous, "Jackson, the Bank War, and Liberalism," *Southwestern Social Science Quarterly*, Sept. 1957, pp. 99-110; Thomas P. Govan, "Fundamental Issues of the Bank War," *Pa. Mag. of Hist. & Biog.*, July 1958, pp. 305-15.

¹³ Arthur M. Schlesinger, Jr., *The Age of Jackson* (N.Y., 1945); Bray Hammond, *Banks and Politics in America from the Revolution to the Civil War* (Princeton, 1957).

prior to Jackson's election in 1828 Congress had twice granted an exclusive twenty-year charter of incorporation to a national bank. The first charter, granted in 1791, had expired in 1811. The charter of the Second Bank, granted in 1816, was due to expire in 1836. While Jackson had attacked the Bank in his first message to Congress in 1829, and had referred to the subject again in his next two annual messages, the outbreak of the Bank War did not occur until 1832.¹⁴ As we all know, Clay and Webster in that presidential election year persuaded a reluctant Nicholas Biddle, President of the Bank, to seek at that time a renewal of the charter, on the dubious ground that if the president did not intend to permit a renewal when the charter expired in 1836 it would be necessary to begin well in advance to wind up the concerns of the Bank. Their real motive, of course, was to use the expected Presidential veto of the recharter bill as a campaign issue against Jackson in the election. These expectations were not disappointed. The recharter bill passed both Houses of Congress only to meet with Jackson's veto. The Bank then became the dominant issue in the election, and Jackson interpreted his landslide victory over Clay as an expression of popular hostility to the Bank. Deciding to destroy the sinews of the Bank's power, Jackson then had his Secretary of the Treasury remove the Government deposits from the Bank and place them in selected state-chartered institutions, called derisively by his opponents "pet banks." With the removal of the deposits in 1833 and 1834 the Bank of the United States came to an end as a national institution.

Throughout the stirring episodes of these years Roger B. Taney alternately goaded and guided the President in his war on the Bank. In 1831 he alone of the members of the Cabinet urged Jackson, with only partial success, to take a stronger stand against the Bank in the Presidential message to Congress of that year.¹⁵

¹⁴ Swisher, *Taney*, pp. 172-8.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 175-8.

Alone in the Cabinet the following year, and this time with complete success, he advocated an uncompromising rather than a qualified Presidential veto of the recharter bill. It was Taney who composed the legal portion of the veto message, and who perhaps also revised the political part of it. In 1833, following the election, it was Taney once again, to use Prof. Fritz Redlich's phrase, who "whipped Jackson into action against the Bank" by urging the President to withdraw the public deposits.¹⁶ The question immediately arises: why did he do it? What accounts for Taney's enmity to the Bank?

There can be no doubt that a major source of that enmity was the influence exerted upon Taney by a Baltimore banker named Thomas Ellicott. President of the Union Bank of Maryland, and an old and confidential friend, Ellicott was bitterly critical of the national institution. Possibly his attitude had been shaped by jealousy of Biddle, for prior to Biddle's selection as President of the U. S. Bank Ellicott had been discussed in Baltimore as a candidate for that office. An important figure about whom we know too little, except unhappily for some evidence of his eventual dishonesty, Ellicott was the man who "originated or at least promoted the idea of state banks taking the place of the Bank of the United States as public depositories."¹⁷

In the view of Taney's biographer, however, attitudes more deeply set in an ancient heritage conditioned Taney's antipathy towards the Bank. Carl B. Swisher presents Taney as a product of a plantation aristocracy to which merchants were traditional rivals. With the rise of commercial banks in Baltimore that were controlled by merchants and catered to their needs, Taney sprang to the side of farmers and inland businessmen by aiding in efforts to charter rural banks. As a member of the Maryland Senate, for example, he helped secure a charter for the Frederick

¹⁶ Fritz Redlich, *The Molding of American Banking: Men and Ideas* (in two Parts, N.Y., 1951), I, pp. 174-5.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 176-7; Swisher, *Taney*, p. 92; Bruchey, *op. cit.*

County Bank, and became a director of it. Opposed to brokers and speculators who profited from banknote depreciation, he deplored any kind of money which fluctuated in value, and once supported a bill to outlaw the circulation of small notes. Taney's position as a leading citizen for more than twenty years of Frederick, Maryland, a small community whose interests were predominantly rural and agricultural, led him to look upon currency and banking problems from the point of view of farmers and residents of small communities rather than that of merchants or urban people.

These farmers, whether aristocratic or lowly, Swisher noted, "were compelled to act together in their own interest and to align themselves more and more with undifferentiated debtor groups and small propertied groups in general." Urban workers belonged to these "undifferentiated debtor groups," and in 1834 Taney made immaculately clear his concern for their interests.¹⁸ "The laboring classes of the community," he wrote, are paid in small notes, and the most depreciated of these small notes 'are too often used in payments to the poorer and more helpless classes of society.' " He advocated that they be banned from circulation "so that workers would be paid in gold and silver" instead. "In previous provisions for the currency, Taney contended, 'we have been providing facilities for those employed in extensive commerce, and have left the mechanic and laborer to all the hazards of an insecure and unstable circulating medium.' 'It is time,' he thought, 'that the just claims of this portion of society should be regarded in our legislation.' "¹⁹ In the opinion of Arthur Schlesinger, Jr., Taney's "real opposition" to the Bank arose from his "hard-money views."²⁰ Swisher would

¹⁸ Swisher, *Taney*, pp. 85-8, 100, 584-5.

¹⁹ Quoted in Charles Grier Sellers, Jr., *James K. Polk, Jacksonian* (Princeton, 1957), p. 226.

²⁰ *The Age of Jackson*, p. 90.

not deny an element of validity in this contention, for he reminds us that when Taney went to Dickinson College in 1792 "there was no type of currency in circulation in Calvert County, either private, state, or national, which would have been acceptable in the central part of the adjoining state. He had to take specie instead . . ."²¹

Taney had additional reasons for opposing the Bank, but these can best be understood in relation to the purposes for which that institution was established, and in the light of its major operations. Once these have been discussed it will be possible to present an interpretation of Taney's motives which dramatically differs from the viewpoint of Swisher.

The Second Bank of the United States, like its predecessor the First Bank, was a mixed public-private institution. This was true in regard to the purposes for which it was created, and also in regard to its capital and its management. It was, in part, a commercial bank. It was expected, that is to say, to earn profits in the form of interest on loans, extended mainly to the business community, and on such other allowable types of enterprise as dealing in bullion, and in bills of exchange. These profits would be distributed as dividends to the stockholders, four-fifths of whom were private, the other one-fifth of the stock being owned by the Federal Government. Like its predecessor, the Second Bank was expected also to perform services for the national government, for example, to maintain a stable and uniform currency, to make loans to the government, to act as a depository for government monies taken in by customs collectors, land offices, post offices and other agencies, to transfer these funds without charge from one part of the country to another by means of a system of branch banks established in leading cities, to pay interest or principal of the government debt, to pay sums to pensioners, and so on. In return for these services, the Government

²¹ *Roger B. Taney*, p. 83.

would establish no other bank during the life of the institution, and would accept its banknotes in all payments due the United States.²²

The management of the Bank was in the hands of a Board of Directors, whose five government members were appointed by the President of the United States, subject to Senate confirmation. The stockholders elected the remaining Directors. The Directors, in turn, chose one of their own members as President of the Bank.²³ The existence of five government Directors on the Board made it possible, in theory at any rate, for the Government to be informed as to the operations of the Bank. Nor was the Government lacking in other means of control. For example, the Charter of the Bank gave to the Secretary of the Treasury the right to require periodic statements. There existed, too, the power of Congressional investigation. Unfortunately, however, in the judgment of a leading student of the administration of the Second Bank, the late Leonard D. White, these powers "were inadequate," so that the "underlying problem was the lack of effective governmental control over the financial power of the Bank . . ."²⁴ "This powerful corporation, and those who defend it," Taney charged, "seem to regard it as an independent sovereignty, and to have forgotten that it owes any duties to the People, or is bound by any laws but its own will."²⁵ It was White's view that " . . . neither the state nor federal governments had yet discovered the only effective means of controlling the corporate affairs of banks, viz., regular inspection in detail of the operations by official agents skilled in under-

²² George R. Taylor, *The Transportation Revolution, 1815-1860* (N.Y. & Toronto, 1951), pp. 306-7; Leonard D. White, *The Jacksonians; a Study in Administrative History, 1829-1861* (N.Y., 1954), pp. 460-2.

²³ Ralph C. H. Catterall, *The Second Bank of the United States* (Chicago, 1903), p. 481.

²⁴ White, *The Jacksonians*, pp. 462-4.

²⁵ Quoted by A. M. Schlesinger, Jr., *The Age of Jackson*, p. 124.

standing and evaluating banking practice, and with power to act."²⁶

Lack of effective control made possible the corruption and mismanagement which marred the incumbency of the first President of the Bank, William Jones. Corruption was especially notorious in Baltimore, where the officers of the branch bank there worked in concert with a member of the parent board in Philadelphia to so manipulate a huge block of stock as to be able to contract a loan on it to an amount far exceeding the par value of the stock. This episode, as Swisher notes, helped turn Taney against the Bank. Taney later wrote in his *Bank War Manuscript*: "The bank was undoubtedly capable of exercising great influence and possessed powers with which no corporation can be safely trusted in a republican government."²⁷

Even when under the Presidency of the conscientious and extraordinarily able Nicholas Biddle, the Bank, in Taney's view, menaced the life of state-chartered institutions. "The bank itself was fully aware of this power," Taney later wrote. "In a letter of Mr. Biddle to a chairman of a committee of the Senate written some time before the question of re-charter was brought before Congress he states with great confidence, that it had always been in the power of the Bank of the United States to break any state bank it pleased; and the tone of his letter seemed to imply that he thought himself entitled to credit for his forbearance." "This statement of the power of the bank," Taney continued, "ought in my opinion to have been of itself sufficient to prevent the renewal of the charter. It certainly would have been a most dangerous experiment to continue the existence of a monster admitted to be capable of swallowing up the whole of the state banks. It made the existence of the state institutions dependent upon the will of a single individual."²⁸ It was true

²⁶ White, *The Jacksonians*, p. 475.

²⁷ Swisher, *Taney*, pp. 89, 166.

²⁸ *Ibid*, pp. 168-9.

indeed, as Prof. Leonard D. White concluded, that "the whole Board [of the Bank] fell under Biddle's domination. Attendance of the twenty-five directors at the two weekly meetings was irregular and slender; eight was noted as an unusual number."²⁹

The power of the Bank was indeed great, and the two legs upon which that power stood were its relatively huge capital of 35 million dollars, and the fact that it was the depository for the Government. For the Government was the largest single transactor of business in the nation. Payments made to the Government by importers, purchasers of land, and other debtors, were often made in state banknotes, which were deposited in the Bank of the United States or its branches. Banknotes, of course, were nothing more than promissory notes, promises to pay the bearer on demand the amount of gold or silver specified on the face of the note. Simply by presenting these state banknotes to the issuing institution and demanding the promised specie the Bank of the United States could restrain the volume of that institution's loans (the Bank's own conservative loan policy—and loans were usually made in the form of banknotes—made it the creditor, and hence the specie claimant, in settlements with state banks). This was precisely Biddle's policy. There is no evidence of his swallowing up state banks but the enmity he stirred up by curbing excessive banknote issues in order to maintain a stable currency was very real. By compelling state institutions to redeem their banknotes in specie at least once a week he cut down upon their ability to earn profits.³⁰

Nor were state bankers the only rival business toes upon which Biddle trod. After 1826 the Bank of the United States achieved a near-monopoly position in the foreign exchange business, solely by virtue of the size of its transactions and of the

²⁹ White, *The Jacksonians*, p. 472.

³⁰ Catterall, *The Second Bank of the United States*, pp. 96-9; Hammond, *Banks and Politics*, pp. 301, 304-6.

cheaper rates it could afford to charge.³¹ This was not its only offense to the merchants (and brokers) who had formerly dominated the business. In taking action to safeguard the specie reserves of the banking system Biddle necessarily injured the interests of importers. Yet he considered it the proper function of the Bank of the United States to do so. Against the "evil" of "excessive importations," he wrote in the spring of 1828 to the Cashier of the Branch bank in Baltimore, "it is the business of the Bank of the United States to guard." Succinctly he traced the lines of the pattern: "The importers ship specie, or they buy bills from those who do—their goods arrive—are sent immediately to auction—the Banks discount the auction [promissory] notes, the proceeds of which are drawn out in specie & shipped—thus furnishing the means of continuing indefinitely this circle of operations." "The whole evil therefore," Biddle concluded, "lies in an overbanking which occasions an overtrading, and the whole remedy lies in preventing this overbanking." This could be done, he recommended to the Baltimore Cashier, "if for the present you would abstain from increasing your discounts [loans], and particularly if you would avoid giving facilities to those whose operations are most inconvenient to us." Unquestionably, the central banker was acting "to protect the community," as Biddle himself put it, but his diking of the stream of capital can hardly have been applauded by business interests deprived of its nourishment.³²

It seems quite clear that this early practitioner of central banking was able to a significant extent to influence the direction in which credit capital flowed, and hence, the direction of American economic development. Certainly when Biddle took over the presidency in 1823 he was of the opinion that there had been

³¹ Catterall, *The Second Bank of the United States*, pp. 111-12.

³² Nicholas Biddle to John C. White, March 3, 1828 (*John Campbell White Papers*, Md. Hist. Society, Baltimore).

"entirely too much banking" in the South and West. Certainly he "intended to orient the Bank toward the commercially better developed parts of the United States" and to cut down on riskier loans to the other areas.³³ The extent to which he acted upon these views is controversial, although even Prof. Walter B. Smith, who discounts the charge of regional discrimination, admits that criticisms of the Bank on that basis were founded on the desire of these rapidly growing regions for more capital than they were able to obtain. "A great moneyed power is favorable to great capitalists. . . ." Senator Benton of Missouri charged, and Prof. Smith admits, too, that there was "some truth" in the charge of favoritism to individuals.³⁴ Certainly farmers or manufacturers in need of long-term loans knew better than to look to the Bank of the United States for them. For, says Ralph Catterall, the distinguished historian of the Second Bank, it was Biddle's policy to make only short-term loans "even when demands for money were slack." Biddle once refused a long loan to an old and intimate friend in these words: ". . . I do not believe that a loan for eighteen months, however well secured would be done for anybody.'" ³⁵ It is, however, only fair to Biddle to observe that the extent to which commercial banks in general were willing to tie up their funds in long-term loans is a question not by any means sufficiently investigated.

Nevertheless, the heavy hand of the Bank dampened the spirit of enterprise and Taney was clearly aware of some of the areas in which it was exerting this effect. "There is perhaps no business," he once said, "which yields a profit so certain and liberal as the business of banking and exchange; and it is proper that it should be open, as far as practicable, to the most free competition

³³ Catterall, *The Second Bank of the United States*, p. 95; Walter B. Smith, *Economic Aspects of the Second Bank of the United States* (Cambridge, Mass., 1953), p. 240.

³⁴ Smith, *Economic Aspects*, pp. 240-1, 235.

³⁵ Catterall, *The Second Bank of the United States*, p. 100.

and its advantages shared by all classes of society." Nor was this an isolated sentiment. After he had supervised, as Secretary of the Treasury, the removal of the deposits to state banks Taney wrote as follows to the president of each of them: "The deposits of the public money will enable you to afford increased facilities to commerce and to extend your accommodation to individuals. And as the duties which are payable to the government arise from the business and enterprise of the merchants engaged in foreign trade, it is but reasonable that they should be preferred . . . *whenever it can be done without injustice to the claims of other classes of the community.*" Taney's concern for maximum possible freedom in enterprise is also clearly to be seen in his decision in the Charles River Bridge case, which he handed down in 1837 as Chief Justice of the Supreme Court. Considerations of these kinds have led the distinguished Pulitzer Prize winner, Bray Hammond, to interpret Taney as a devotee of *laissez-faire*, as an apostle of a more democratic capitalism,⁸⁶ which would be realized if no group had a privileged position in the competition for capital.

Depending on which point of view you take, therefore, depending upon which facts you deem most deserving of emphasis, you may with Prof. Swisher envisage Taney as the champion of farmers, or of farmers and laborers, or, following Bray Hammond, think of him as a liberator of capitalism, of a swarm of new entrepreneurs in banking, industry, and trade, new businessmen who were seeking to break the hold of an older mercantile aristocracy on the channels of credit dominated by its agency, the United States Bank.⁸⁷

I am myself inclined to think there is much to be said for both points of view. It seems to me that Prof. Charles G. Sellers, Jr., has displayed brilliant insight in characterizing as "ambivalent" the orientation of this whole generation of Americans:

⁸⁶ Bray Hammond, *Banks and Politics*, pp. 741, 420, 336-7.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 328-9.

plunging headlong into the exploitation and transformation of a bountiful environment, yet drawn almost as powerfully back toward the simplicity and virtue of a half-imagined agrarian past . . ." ³⁸ In Taney's case, however, it seems to me that ambivalence is less adequate as characterization than the word encompassing. Taney, as Swisher knows well, encompassed the larger community of human rights and resented its abridgement by monopoly or by privilege. His final tragedy, and it was not so much his individual tragedy as that of his section and his heritage, was that his encompassed community was not all-embracing. Dred Scott must forever haunt his name.

It remains to weigh Taney's contribution to the liberation of enterprise against his contribution to the destruction of central banking. Contemporary admirers of the U. S. Bank's control of currency and credit, such as Hammond and Fritz Redlich, deplore the fact that Taney was instrumental in putting an end to that control. Admirable as *laissez-faire* was as a fillip to most sectors of the growing economy it had no place in the monetary system governed by the U. S. Bank. Hammond concludes that "Sovereign and unified control of the monetary system is needed in any economy, whatever freedoms may be proper otherwise." He characterizes Taney's conduct towards the Bank as "fanatic and deserving little respect;" he was a "spotted Jeffersonian," a "sycophantic" adviser to the President who was only occasionally capable of a "surge of sincerity." ³⁹ By depicting *Taney* as the manipulator Hammond at least reverses the Whig tradition of Channing, McMaster, and Bassett, wherein Taney is depicted as a "pliant instrument" of Jackson.⁴⁰ He reverses, too, the more eloquent Whig view of John Quincy Adams, who saw Taney as

³⁸ James K. Polk, *Jacksonian*, viii.

³⁹ Bray Hammond, *Banks and Politics*, pp. 741, 402, 577, 417, 427.

⁴⁰ Swisher, *Taney*, pp. 583-4.

one of a group of "supple and submissive assentators."⁴¹ Prof. Redlich is somewhat more kind: "Since Taney's honesty is beyond question," he concludes, "he must be characterized as naive in banking matters." Redlich agrees that "It was Taney who guided the President . . ." rather than the other way round.⁴²

I am not disposed to quarrel with these judgments as to Taney's knowledge of banking. Unquestionably, by helping Jackson destroy the Bank he helped set back the good cause of central banking for the remainder of the 19th century. A rash of unregulated banks pouring inflated paper into the hectic stream of commerce was one of the consequences of the Bank's destruction. But there were other consequences too. As Prof. Richard Hofstadter has pointed out, the Bank War symbolized a struggle against corporate privilege, and this struggle was waged on a much wider front after that war had flared up, died, and been forgotten. In the states the struggle "bore fruit in a series of general incorporation acts, beginning with Connecticut's in 1837 and spreading to the other states in the two decades before the Civil War." Previously, corporate charters had mainly conferred rights of monopoly upon their recipients, as, for example the charters of both national banks had done. With the opening of the process of incorporation to all applicants who could meet state requirements the corporate form of business enterprise was dissociated from monopoly privilege to become for many decades an element in the growth of free enterprise. This result, Hofstadter justly remarks, was "a contribution to the development of American business that can hardly be overestimated." He thinks, however, that these advances came "at an unnecessarily high cost."⁴³ On the other hand, Bray Hammond concludes that

⁴¹ Samuel F. Bemis, *John Quincy Adams and the Union* (N.Y., 1956), p. 406.

⁴² Fritz Redlich, *The Molding of American Banking*, I. 175, 177.

⁴³ Richard Hofstadter, *The American Political Tradition And the Men Who Made It* (N.Y., 1948), p. 63.

"... the period was one of such prodigious growth in population, territory, natural wealth, and accumulated wealth that the cost could be borne."⁴⁴

With Hammond's view I am in complete agreement. The great and crying need of the underdeveloped country which the United States was in the early 19th century, was capital. With the destruction of the Bank came an end to restraints upon credit expansion—and an end, too, to Biddle's unassigned and legislatively uninhibited power to influence the contours of American economic growth. The democratization of the corporation, to which Taney contributed in both the main public areas of his life, made possible the assembling of the capital needed for that growth.

Finally, it may be worthwhile for those who deplore the setback to the cause of central banking to reflect upon the strength of regional and local attachments which made the enforcing of unified banking policies difficult even for Biddle.⁴⁵ Indeed, even after transportation and communication advances had brought national economic unification these same centrifugal forces helped weaken the powers of the Federal Reserve Board until the legislative changes of the 1930's.⁴⁶ The destruction of central banking may therefore not have been such a high opportunity cost of national development as is commonly believed. Taney's controversial role in the Bank War, therefore, may have benefitted development more than it injured it.

⁴⁴ Bray Hammond, *Banks and Politics*, p. 741.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 313.

⁴⁶ Ross M. Robertson, *History of the American Economy* (N.Y. 1955), pp. 439-42.

WILLIAM WOOD GERHARD PIONEER IN NOSOGRAPHY

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WILLIAM WOOD GERHARD: PIONEER IN NOSOGRAPHY

IT is an honor for me to present the first Boyd Lee Spahr Lecture in Americana at Dickinson College in the tenth year of this fine series. Dr. Spahr was already known to me as President of The Historical Society of Pennsylvania, distinguished barrister and benefactor of Dickinson College. Also, I recall seeing a photograph of President Edel greeting Princess Margaret at Carlisle, England, on my visit there last year. Now I am pleased to visit Carlisle, Pennsylvania, and speak on the life and work of Dr. William Wood Gerhard, a graduate of Dickinson College in 1826 and pioneer in American nosography.

Nosography, a term coined from the Greek, *nosos* (disease) and *graphein* (to write), refers to a written account or description of disease—a field in which Dr. Gerhard received world recognition in his lifetime. For it was Gerhard who first clearly differentiated typhoid from typhus fevers at Philadelphia in 1837. In the following year he became the first president of the Pathological Society of Philadelphia (a group of physicians interested in the study of disease processes)—a forerunner of the present body. Today he is honored by the William Wood Gerhard Gold Medal of the Philadelphia Pathological Society, awarded annually for outstanding “zeal in research.” Dr. Gerhard’s lucid descriptions of several dread diseases, still found in less fortunate parts of the world, helped bring order into the confused

contemporary concept of fever—one which regarded this sign as a separate entity rather than as a response of the body to noxious stimuli. A fine figure in the fabric of American medical history, Gerhard ranks with Oliver Wendell Holmes, the physician-author of Boston, as the most outstanding in a group of American students who ventured to Paris in the first half of the nineteenth century and bore the torch of medical progress from France to the United States. Today we recall Gerhard's memory not primarily as a distinguished alumnus of Dickinson College, but because he brought to Philadelphia one of its crowning achievements in nosography and helped gain stature for American medicine in the early years of the United States.

The story of how this Moravian lad, a graduate in arts at Dickinson and medicine at the University of Pennsylvania, went to Europe for study and returned to this country to solve a major medical controversy of his time is a thrilling one. We can share pride in Dr. Gerhard's life and lasting contributions to medicine on the occasion of this Boyd Lee Spahr Lecture in Americana at the venerable college at which he spent three formative years.

Before developing my chosen topic, permit me to digress briefly to mention Dickinson's long and continuing association with the medical profession. Dickinson has reflected for almost two centuries many of the main currents of American thought and its teachers and students have in some measure contributed to the making of the American mind—in many fields. Among this group from Carlisle are a number of physicians—several of whom I will mention.

When Dr. Benjamin Rush, distinguished physician and founder of Dickinson College, drafted the plan of a curriculum for his infant in 1784, he gave mathematics and natural philosophy (encompassing chemistry and physics) equal rank with the classics and philosophy among the subjects that must be taught. Through its first Principal, the Reverend Charles Nisbet,

Dickinson College was a product of the Scottish Enlightenment of the eighteenth century—with the high value it placed on science. The college seal to this day bears a telescope along with an open Bible and liberty cap; appropriate emblems of the intention of its founders.

Dr. Rush, who later, in 1787, was also a founder of the College of Physicians of Philadelphia (a medical society flourishing to this day), interested several of his physician-friends in Dickinson College. For example, the English Quaker Dr. John Coakley Lettsom, remembered as the founder of The Medical Society of London, donated several volumes to the original Dickinson College Library.

Dr. Samuel McCrosky, a physician in Carlisle who became a son-in-law to Principal Nisbet, served as a trustee of the college from 1783-1815. Dr. James Smith, a graduate in 1792, became the founder of a pioneer vaccine institution in the United States to provide protection against smallpox. Dr. Gerhard, subject of this lecture, became a medical celebrity in the nineteenth century. These and other physicians had ties with the pioneer college at Carlisle, in the Cumberland Valley across the Susquehanna River.

William Wood Gerhard was born in Philadelphia on July 23, 1809. He came from fine stock on both sides of the family. His great grandfather, Frederick Gerhard, had emigrated from Hesse Darmstadt in 1737 to settle in Berks County, Pennsylvania. Shortly thereafter (1745) it is recorded that this forebear changed his allegiance from the German Reformed to the Moravian Church. The grandfather of William Wood Gerhard, Conrad by name, came to Philadelphia where his son, William, was born in 1774. Here William Gerhard and Sarah Wood, William Wood Gerhard's parents, were married in 1808. Sarah Wood's home had been in Salem County, New Jersey, and her family had come from Anglo-Saxon and North Irish roots. They, too, were Moravians in creed.

The earliest picture of William Wood Gerhard drawn from family tradition depicts the lad perched on a top shelf of a closet filled with books, too engrossed in his reading to hear the dinner bell or repeated calls for him. A favorite posture in reading large folios, such as the volumes of the historian Josephus, was to place the book on a sofa while he sat on a lower chair placed in front of this bookrest.

Industry and application to studies also marked the young Gerhard's work at Dickinson College, which he entered in 1823 at age fourteen. Both William Wood Gerhard and his brother Benjamin were members of the Union Philosophical Society, student debating society founded in 1789 and still in existence. Its rival group was then, as now, the Belles Lettres Society. In Gerhard's student days at Carlisle, the college was struggling along after an earlier period of academic lustre. John Mitchell Mason, formerly at Columbia, and an outstanding preacher of the Reformed Church, was already ill when he assumed the presidency of Dickinson. The college had lost Dr. Thomas Cooper, its eminent Professor of Chemistry and Natural Philosophy, in 1815. Before he left, however, he had arranged for the college to purchase much of the scientific equipment of his friend Joseph Priestley, late of Northumberland. Pieces of this apparatus were undoubtedly used by Gerhard while a student at Dickinson. Such men as Cooper and Priestley gave early American science the stimulation of their knowledge, reputation and continuing correspondence with European scientists. President James Madison, a Princeton graduate, sent two nephews to Carlisle, and Thomas Jefferson's friend Pierre du Pont sent his second son, Alfred Victor, to Dickinson because of early scientific interests there.

In 1824 President Mason was succeeded by William Neill, a Presbyterian clergyman who headed the institution until 1828—five years before its transfer to the Methodist Episcopal Church.

A distinguished teacher in Gerhard's day was Henry Vethake, a mathematician from Princeton who later left Dickinson for the University of Pennsylvania where he subsequently became Provost. At the commencement of 1826, when Gerhard graduated at age seventeen, honorary degrees were awarded, among others, to John Buchanan, Chief Justice of Maryland, and to Richard Henry Lee of Virginia.

Following graduation Gerhard became an apprentice to Dr. Joseph Parrish, an eminent practitioner in Philadelphia. This was the usual system of medical instruction at the time for medical courses only lasted four months over a two year period. In the library of the College of Physicians of Philadelphia, among other interesting Gerhard items, is his notebook of Parrish's lectures at the University of Pennsylvania. The lectures of 1828 duplicate those of the previous year, with the exception of citations of personal experiences interspersed during each session. Examples of Gerhard's classroom notes amply indicate the trend of medical education and practice of the day. Purging and bloodletting were foremost in treatment. Of the medical faculty at Pennsylvania, the individual who seems to have wielded the most influence over students of that period was Dr. Samuel Jackson, then an assistant to Professor Nathaniel Chapman. The former's colorful, dynamic personality overshadowed his superiors and associates, and his intense interest in the current advances in France was a source of inspiration to the students.

William Wood Gerhard graduated from the University of Pennsylvania School of Medicine in 1830. His graduation thesis concerned the endermic application of drugs. (Prior to the invention of the hypodermic syringe by Dr. Charles-Gabriel Pravaz of Paris in 1851, drugs were often placed on denuded body surfaces for absorption.) Gerhard served as a resident physician at the Philadelphia Almshouse for some time prior to his graduation. His careful observations on patients during this interval

showed an unusual maturity of thought and judgment. He continued his residency at the Almshouse after graduation.

In the Spring of 1831 Gerhard left for Paris on the advice of Samuel Jackson. Although originally directed to the well-known Dr. Broussais, Gerhard found him an uninspiring teacher. Letters sent to kinsfolk during his Paris stay have been preserved in Sir William Osler's essay upon "The Influence of Louis on American Medicine." For it was Pierre-Charles-Alexandre Louis, now acknowledged as the founder of medical statistics, who became the mentor of Gerhard and other American students then in the hospitals of Paris. Among this remarkable group were Meredith Clymer, George W. Norris, Caspar W. Pennock and Alfred Stillé from Philadelphia, Henry I. Bowditch, Oliver Wendell Holmes, James Jackson, Jr., and George C. Shattuck of Boston, Alonzo Clark of New York, and Elisha Bartlett of Rhode Island. This group has been aptly labelled the "American Medical Argonauts." Louis' influence upon many of his American students became apparent before they left Paris. Gerhard wrote home: "Dr. Louis is delivering an interesting clinic at La Pitié; he is a remarkable man, very different from the physicians of England or America and remarkable even at Paris by the strict mathematical accuracy with which he arrives at his results." Oliver Wendell Holmes later summed up Louis' fine influence in a farewell address to students at the Harvard Medical School in 1882:

He was a man of lofty and admirable scientific character, and his work will endure in its influence long after his name is lost sight of save to the eyes of the student of medical literature. . . . I learned three things in Paris:—not to take authority when I can have facts; not to guess when I can know; and not to think a man must take physic because he is sick.

The French language offered no difficulty to Gerhard, since custom had made it the household medium in his family. The days in Paris were crowded and a busy schedule insured every

advantage to the American student. Gerhard's letters to home are full of reports of long hours of postgraduate study, along with clinical work at La Charité, La Pitié and La Salpêtrière hospitals under Drs. Louis, Piorry, Andral and Chomel. Gerhard carefully recorded his clinical observations in a journal which is preserved in the College of Physicians of Philadelphia. In 1832 he published an article in conjunction with Caspar W. Pennock on Asiatic cholera in Paris. References are repeatedly found in this period to the activities of the *Société Médicale d'Observation*, to the proceedings of which a number of the American students contributed while in Paris. The spell of Louis' teaching was strong upon them, and their reports not only in Paris but after their return to America bore its stamp in the meticulous detail of their observations and the dispassionate subscription to fact. His scientific technique for comparing signs and symptoms in the individual patient with other similar living and post-mortem cases—the so-called "numerical method"—was Louis' basis for remarkable studies on the efficacy of bloodletting in pneumonia, tuberculosis and typhoid fever. He was the first to employ the term, "typhoid," to distinguish this disease from its simulator, typhus. The word typhus comes from the Greek *typhos*, meaning "stupor," and is suggestive of the condition of the febrile patient. "Typhoid" denotes a similarity to typhus in terminology.

Gerhard visited the British Isles prior to his return to Philadelphia late in 1833. In Paris he had studied what the French had called typhus fever, really typhoid fever, and afterwards in England, Scotland and Ireland he observed what was called typhus fever there. He was already conscious of a difference between the two—a difference which he established with painstaking thoroughness after his return to America.

Returning to Philadelphia, Gerhard served as resident physician at the Pennsylvania Hospital from 1834 to 1836. Elected to the staff of the Philadelphia Hospital in 1835, in the

year following its removal across the Schuylkill to Blockley Township, he gained additional experience investigating several hundred cases of typhus fever during the Philadelphia epidemic of 1836. (It was Gerhard who had suggested changing the name of the Philadelphia Almshouse to "Philadelphia Hospital" upon its removal to a rural location; the latter name persisted until the turn of the century when its present title, Philadelphia General Hospital, was adopted).

Working with his colleagues, Caspar W. Pennock and Alfred Stillé, Gerhard demonstrated that the prevalent "spotted fever" of Philadelphia was identical with the typhoid fever he had studied at La Pitié in Paris. Having learned from Louis to recognize typhoid fever, and having enlarged his experience with it while a resident at the Pennsylvania Hospital, Gerhard had opportunity at Old Blockley to study hundreds of cases—thus proving the absence of intestinal, mesenteric and splenic lesions in some fifty autopsies, and establishing for the first time the separate entity of the two diseases. (Typhoid, a bacterial infection causing ulcerations in the lymphoid follicles of the intestines, as well as a skin rash similar to that seen in typhus, was earlier confused clinically. It must be remembered that Gerhard worked fifty years before the specific microorganisms causing typhus and typhoid fevers were discovered. Typhus, in epidemic form, is a rickettsial disease transmitted by the rat flea. Typhoid, on the other hand, is a filth disease which is transmitted by the oral-anal route of polluted water or food.) Dr. Edward B. Krumbhaar of the University of Pennsylvania Medical School has cited Gerhard's work in 1836 as, "the greatest achievement hitherto accomplished by an American student of disease."

Gerhard's articles, "On the typhus fever, which occurred at Philadelphia in the spring and summer of 1836; illustrated by Clinical Observations at the Philadelphia Hospital; showing the distinction between this form of disease and . . . typhoid fever,

with alteration of the follicles of the small intestine," were published in *The American Journal of the Medical Sciences* in February and August of 1837. These reports received immediate recognition in this country and Europe and were reprinted in the *Dublin Journal of Medical Science*, September, 1837, and abstracted in the *London Medico-Chirurgical Review*, October, 1837. The next year they were translated in *l'Experience* of Paris, and subsequent reports corroborated Gerhard's findings. Stressing the incidence of these diseases over fifty years later in his monumental *Principles and Practice of Medicine* (1892), Dr. William Osler devoted the first forty-three pages to typhoid and typhus fevers, and noted: "To Gerhard of Philadelphia, is due the great honor of having first clearly laid down the differences between the two diseases. His papers in *The American Journal of the Medical Sciences* are undoubtedly the first in any language which give a full and satisfactory account of the clinical and anatomical distinctions we now recognize. No student should fail to read these articles, among the most classical in American medical literature."

Gerhard also had much success as a teacher; in 1838, at the age of twenty-nine, he was appointed Lecturer on Clinical Medicine at the University of Pennsylvania. He was associated in teaching there with Dr. Samuel Jackson, his former teacher who was then in the zenith of his career. Numerous tributes survive to attest the high quality of Gerhard's teaching. In a *Memoir*, his pupil Thomas Stewardson praised Gerhard's skill:

Without pretension to eloquence, he riveted the attention of his hearers and stimulated their enthusiasm. Students saw that truth was his object, not display; the advancement of science, and not the gratification of personal feelings. . . . In his mind, a deep interest in his subject and a thorough consciousness in the pursuit of it were the over-mastering motives. In an easy and conversational style he presented to his hearers a graphic picture of the case before them; impressing upon their minds the most striking features in its history; pointing out, by a few clear and practical

expressions, the bearing of any particular fact upon interesting medical questions. . . . He confined himself to drawing such practical conclusions as were clearly deductible from the facts presented.

Large groups of medical students attended Gerhard's lectures at the Philadelphia Hospital; 261 were registered at one time for his course. That the students were satisfied with the instruction they received at his hands is apparent in a set of resolutions adopted by them and published in the *American Medical Intelligencer* for 1841:

A portion of the medical class of the University of Pennsylvania, who have attended the lectures at the Philadelphia Hospital, being desirous of expressing their sense of the value and importance of clinical instruction, and of their obligation to Dr. W. W. Gerhard, for the able course of lectures delivered by him at that institution during the present session, have met together for that purpose; therefore,

Resolved: 1st: That we consider clinical (bedside) instruction the most important method of teaching the pathological states of the system, and of familiarizing the mind of the student with the means of correcting the aberrations from the standard of health.

2d. That we consider the course of lectures now being delivered on clinical medicine, at the Philadelphia Hospital, of great value, particularly because of the truly scientific as well as practical manner, in which diseases, involved in much obscurity, are elucidated.

3rd. That we consider Dr. Gerhard eminently qualified to give instruction in clinical medicine and pathological anatomy, and that we particularly admire his unequalled skill in illustrating the diseases of the thoracic viscera.

4th. That a committee of ten be appointed to present a copy of these resolutions to Dr. Gerhard, and to tender him our thanks for the zeal and ability which he has manifested in the interests of the class.

5th. That these resolutions be signed by the chairman and secretary, and that a copy of them be presented to the Faculty through their Dean.

6th. That a copy of these resolutions be also sent to the Medical Journals and newspapers of this city, with a request that they publish them.



WILLIAM WOOD GERHARD

The photograph was used by the sculptor Dr. R. Tait McKenzie in modelling the William Wood Gerhard Medal, the Philadelphia Pathological Society's award honoring achievements in research.

The above resolutions, signed by twelve delegates, are a lasting tribute to one of the best medical teachers in the United States during the nineteenth century.

Dr. Gerhard was also a founder, and first president of the Philadelphia Pathological Society in 1838. Holding weekly meetings, its announced purpose was, "the exhibition of specimens of morbid anatomy, met with in hospital or private practice, and the collection of these specimens in a museum of pathological anatomy." This group continued meeting until 1843, when it went out of existence. Later, in 1857, the present Philadelphia Pathological Society was established—to meet at monthly intervals. Dr. Gerhard was a charter member of this second body—the Society which now honors its patron each year by awarding the William Wood Gerhard Gold Medal to a distinguished scientist. The medal, designed by the physician-artist Dr. R. Tait McKenzie, bears on its obverse a portrait of Dr. Gerhard, in later life, full face, showing head and shoulders, with the dates of his birth and death, 1809-1872, in the field. Around it is a ribbon carrying the inscription, "William Wood Gerhard Medal." It is signed with the monogram, R. T. M., 1925. The reverse shows a tripod carrying a lamp of learning. Entwined about it is a serpent looking toward the light. In the field is the inscription arranged in parallel lines, "The Philadelphia Pathological Society Honors Zeal in Research." The first award was made on November 12, 1925, at the Pennsylvania Hospital, to Dr. William H. Welch of the Johns Hopkins University Medical School. The medal and an address by the recipient have been a feature of the Society's annual dinner meeting to the present time.

William Wood Gerhard published his first book in 1837: "A Clinical Guide and Syllabus of a Course of Lectures on Clinical Medicine and Pathology." A subsequent volume, *Lectures on the Diagnosis, Pathology and Treatment of Diseases of the Chest*, published in 1842, was revised four times through

1860. An early treatise on physical diagnosis, it emphasized the value of the stethoscope as an aid to diagnosis and helped establish the use of auscultation in this country.

Other papers on nosography by Gerhard include interesting studies on smallpox (1833), rubeola (1833), and pneumonia (1834) in children. His monograph on tuberculous meningitis in children (1834), the first accurate clinical study of the disease (based largely on his experience at *L'hôpital des Enfants Malades* in Paris), is also of enduring value. Osler, in 1909, wrote: "In 1832 and 1833, W. W. Gerhard, of Philadelphia, made a very careful study of this disease in the Children's Hospital at Paris, and his publications, more than those of any other author, served to place the disease on a firm anatomical and clinical basis."

Dr. Gerhard contracted typhoid fever while working among the sick in 1837, and this illness impaired his subsequent health. He continued teaching and practice for many years, however, serving on the Blockley staff from 1835-45, and at the Pennsylvania Hospital from 1845-68. His professional achievements included membership in the College of Physicians of Philadelphia (1834), Academy of Natural Sciences (1835), and American Philosophical Society (1843). He was also esteemed in his native city for his personal geniality and kindness. With a colleague, Dr. William J. Johnston, he organized and conducted the dispensary clinics for sick poor in conjunction with his medical teaching. When he resigned from this post, his associates presented him with a silver pitcher, engraved with the Philadelphia Dispensary building. This token of appreciation is now in the College of Physicians of Philadelphia Historical Collections.

James Tyson, a later pupil, described Gerhard as, "tall with a not unbecoming stoop." As shown in existing likenesses, his features were homely but cheerful. Thick convex lenses accentuated the natural prominence of his eyes. He was reported to be often joking, his countenance usually lighted with a smile.

Stewardson noted that Gerhard was considerate of his fellow men, charitable toward others and incapable of animosity. "Placid in temper, kind and generous in his feelings, genial and gentle in his manners, he won the affection as well as the respect of his associates."

Six years after his bout with typhoid fever, in 1843, Gerhard suffered an obscure malady, causing slight loss of power in one leg, from which he never completely recuperated. He believed that he had suffered a slight stroke. A European sojourn in the summer of 1844 was most beneficial, both physically and professionally. On his return to Philadelphia he threw himself into his teaching and practice with renewed vigor. His position established, at forty years of age, he married the daughter of Major William A. Dobbyn, a retired British Army officer. Three children were born to this union, all of whom with their mother survived Gerhard. In 1845, after ten years of service, he resigned from the staff of the Philadelphia Hospital. His election to a similar post at the Pennsylvania Hospital in 1845, together with increasing demands of practice and teaching, probably actuated this move. He held the latter hospital appointment until 1868, although James Tyson, a resident physician in 1863, remarked, "When I came to reside at the Pennsylvania Hospital . . . his brilliant teaching days were over and he is better remembered by resident physicians of that day for his sallies of wit and humor, than for serious clinical teaching." In 1867-68, however, Gerhard compiled the first volume of *Pennsylvania Hospital Reports*, which are valuable in a large measure by reason of his discussion of fevers.

The summer of 1868 was spent in Europe, and Gerhard derived great satisfaction from a visit to his beloved teacher, Louis. The accidental fracture of Gerhard's ankle in December, 1868, proved a serious shock and his ultimate decline dated from this injury. He retired from practice and died from cerebral apoplexy

on April 28, 1872, at sixty-two years of age. He was buried in South Laurel Hill Cemetery, Philadelphia.

Twenty years later, in 1892, his friend Dr. Oliver Wendell Holmes of Boston recalled Gerhard's memory when made an honorary Fellow of the College of Physicians of Philadelphia. In verses read on that occasion, Holmes honored Gerhard when recalling their student days in Paris:

Friends of my earlier manhood ever dear,
—with life before us yet untried,
We walked the "Latin Quarter" side by side
Through halls of death, through palaces of pain
That cast their shadows on the turbid Seine.
When o'er our coffee, at the old "Procope,"
Smiling we cast each other's horoscope,
Daring the future's dubious path to scan,
Gerhard, your Gerhard was the coming man.
Strong-brained, strong-willed, inquiring, patient, wise,
He looked on truth through achromatic eyes;
Sure to succeed, for Nature, like a maid,
Loves best the lovers who are not afraid,
Lends them her hand to lead them where they please,
And trusts them boldly with her master-keys.
Behold, unfading on the roles of fame
Typhus and Typhoid stamped with Gerhard's name!

In conclusion, through William Wood Gerhard and his contemporaries, American medicine came of age at the middle of the nineteenth century. In its youth, it was but a reflection of what was thought in European medical centers. In mid-century, however, American medicine produced for the first time its own luminaries whose contributions to medical science became widely known. The names of William Beaumont, Austin Flint, William Wood Gerhard, Oliver Wendell Holmes, and others recall unique contributions. Surgeons such as Ephraim McDowell, Crawford Long, Marion Sims and Samuel Gross performed operations seldom before attempted, gave and taught the world to operate under anesthesia. American medicine gradually merged with

world medicine, not as a subordinate element but as an equal. It is to these pioneers, Gerhard and his contemporaries, that we owe much—for past recognition and continued blessings of health which have come to us from their labors.

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